


TOHYRZA



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T H Y R Z A

VOL. III.



# T H Y R Z A

*A TALE*

BY

GEORGE GISSING

AUTHOR OF 'DEMOS'  
ETC.

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*ἄμμες δὲ βροτοὶ οἴδε· βροτοὺς βροτοὶ αἰίδωμες.*

---

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

LONDON

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CONTENTS  
OF  
THE THIRD VOLUME.

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CHAPTER	PAGE
I. TOGETHER AGAIN . . . . .	1
II. MOVEMENTS . . . . .	30
III. AN OLD MAN'S REST . . . . .	46
IV. TOTTY'S LUCK . . . . .	71
V. A MINOR PROPHET . . . . .	91
VI. THE HEART AND ITS SECRET . . . . .	115
VII. 'MARK BUT MY FALL!' . . . . .	129
VIII. A LOAN ON SECURITY . . . . .	147
IX. THREE LETTERS . . . . .	172
X. THYRZA WAITS . . . . .	188
XI. EIRONEIA . . . . .	208
XII. THE TRUTH . . . . .	221
XIII. HER RETURN . . . . .	240
XIV. HER REWARD . . . . .	256
XV. THE LIVING . . . . .	275



# THYRZA.



## CHAPTER I.

### TOGETHER AGAIN.

LYDIA held desperately to hope through the days and the nights. From all others Thyrza might hide away, but could she persist in cruelty to her sister? Surely in some way a message, if only a message, would be delivered; at least there would come a word to relieve this unendurable suspense. Every added day of silence was an added fear.

Unable to associate with acquaintances to whom Thyrza's name had become an unfailing source of vulgar gossip, she changed her place of work. Work had still to be done, be her heart ever so sore; the meals must be earned, though now they were eaten in solitude. And she worked harder than ever, for it was her dread that at any moment she might hear of Thyrza in distress or danger, and she must have money laid by for such an emergency. All means of inquiry were used, save that of going to the police-court and having the

event made public through the newspapers. Neither Lydia nor Gilbert could bear to do that, even after they felt assured that the child was somewhere wandering alone.

Totty Nancarrow was an active ally in the search, though Lydia did not know it. Totty, as soon as that unfortunate game of cross-purposes with Luke Ackroyd had come to an end, experienced a revival of all her kindness for Thyrza. Privately she was of opinion that no faith whatever should be given to Egremont's self-defence. In concert with Ackroyd, she even planned an elaborate scheme for tracking Egremont in his goings hither and thither. They discovered that he was very seldom at his rooms in Great Russell Street, but their resources did not allow them to keep a watch upon him when he was away from town, which appeared to be very frequently the case. Circumstances of a darkly suggestive kind they accumulated in abundance, and for weeks constantly believed themselves on the point of discovering something. Bunce was taken into their confidence, but he, poor fellow, had occupation enough for his leisure at home, since Bessie was at Eastbourne. Little Nelly Bunce often fretted in vain for the attentions of 'Miss Nanco,' upon whom she had begun to feel a claim. 'Miss Nanco,' for the nonce a female detective, had little time for nursing.

And Gilbert Grail was once more going to his daily labour, not at the same factory, however, for he too could not mix with men who knew him. About a



fortnight after the day on which he should have been married, he got a place at candle-works in Battersea. He could not leave the house in Walnut Tree Walk, for he, as persistently as Lydia, clung to the hope that Thyrza might reappear in her home some night. To go away would be to say good-bye for ever to that dream which had so glorified a few months of his life, and in spite of all he could not do that.

He said to Lydia once, when they parted after a long walk together in the dark streets, 'If I come to believe that I've lost her, I shall go mad.' And that way in truth lay despair. He would not, could not, believe it; it would have been easier to lay himself down and let life ebb away from him by neglect of natural needs. That hope *was* his life. It had been revived since his meeting with Egremont, and Lydia, for her own solace, helped to encourage him. These two grew more than brother and sister. When Mrs. Grail, who had aged more in these few weeks than in the past ten years, went early to her bedroom, Gilbert and Lydia often sat together in the parlour till midnight. Lydia put her faith in the last sentence of Thyrza's letter—a letter read how often!

'She promises to come back, Gilbert. She is working somewhere, waiting till she feels able to see us again. If she was ill, she would send for me, I know she would.'

'She went away penniless. How could she live till she found work?'

‘She had a little money. I thought it was only about sixpence, but I feel sure I was mistaken. It must have been more than that—just enough to live somehow for a day or two. She might find somebody that would be kind to her.’

Gilbert kept silence, not daring to hear his own thoughts.

‘Perhaps she comes late at night and looks at the house.’

One or other suggested that, and thereafter Gilbert never went to bed without passing out into the street and looking either way, or perhaps walking as far as Kennington Road. So he had been wont, formerly, to go out and glance up at the window above. Those occasions always came back to his mind.

In comparison with his own, the suffering of others seemed trifling. When his mother went about in silence, bending more than she had done, all interest in the things of life and in her studies of Swedenborg at an end, he thought that much of it was due to her wish to show sympathy with him. When Lydia sat through an hour with her face hidden in her hands, he knew that the day had been very dark and weary with her, but said in himself that a sister’s love was little compared with such as his. He would not reason on what had happened, save when to do so with Lydia brought him comfort ; alone, he brooded over his hope. It was the only way to save himself from madness.

On the day after seeing Egremont he received a long

letter from him. Egremont wrote from his heart, and with a force of sincerity which must have swept away any doubts, had such still lingered with the reader. The inevitable antagonism of the personal interview was a pain in his memory; if the intercourse of friendship was for ever at an end for them, he could not bear to part in this way, with hesitating words, with doubts and reticences. 'In your bitter misery,' he said, 'you may accuse me of affecting sympathy which I do not feel, and may scorn my expressions of grief as a cheap way of saving my self-respect. I will not compare my suffering with yours, but none the less it is intense. This is the first great sorrow of my life, and I do not think a keener one will ever befall me. Keep this letter by you; do not be content to read it once and throw it aside, for I have spoken to you out of my deepest feeling, and in time you will do me more justice than you can now.' And further on: 'As to that which has parted us, there must be no ambiguity, no pretence of superhuman generosity. I should lie if I said that I do not wish to find Thyrza for my own sake. If I find her, I shall ask her to be my wife. I wanted to say this when we spoke together, but could not; neither was I calm enough to express this rightly, nor you rightly to hear it.'

Gilbert allowed a day or two to go by, then made answer. He wrote briefly, but enough to show Egremont that the man's natural nobility could triumph over his natural resentment. It was a moving letter,

its pathos lying in the fact that its writer shunned all attempt to be pathetic. 'Now that I know the truth,' he said, 'I can only ask your pardon for the thoughts I had of you; you have not wronged me, and I can have no ill-feeling against you. If Thyrza is ever your wife, I hope your happiness may be hers. As for the other things, do not reproach yourself. You wished to befriend me, and I think I was not unworthy of it. Few things in life turn out as we desire; to have done one's best with a good intention is much to look back upon—very few have more.'

Gilbert did not show this letter to Lydia, nor had he told her of what he had learnt in the conversation with Egremont. The fear would have seemed more intolerable if he had uttered it. But the hope which supported him was proof against even such a danger as this. To his mind there was something unnatural in a union between Egremont and Thyrza; try as he would, he could not realise it as having come to pass. The two were parted by so vast a social distinction, and, let nature say what it will, the artificialities of life in the end invariably prevail. He could imagine an unpermitted bond between them, with the necessary end in Thyrza's sacrifice to the world's injustice; but their marriage appeared to him among the things so unlikely as to be in practice impossible. Of course the wish was father to the thought. But he reasoned upon the hope which would not abandon him. Thyrza had again and again proved the extreme sensitiveness of her nature;

she could not bear to inflict pain. He remembered how she had once come back after saying good-night, because it seemed to her that she had spoken with insufficient kindness. The instance was typical. And now, though tempted by every motive that can tempt a woman, she had abandoned herself to unimagined trials rather than seek her own welfare at another's expense. Picture the average girl finding herself in Thyrza's position. Gilbert took it for granted that she knew Egremont loved her. To fulfil her promise had been beyond her power, but, if there must be suffering, she would share it. And now, in that wretched exile, he knew that self-pity could not absorb her. She would think of him constantly, and of such thought would come compassion and repentance. Those feelings might bring her back. If only she came back, it was enough. She could not undo what she had done, but neither could she forbid him to live with eyes on the future. One great thing was in his favour. It was impossible for her to remain long separated from her sister, and reunion with Lydia would mean a gradual return to the former habits of mind. Egremont would pass completely from her world; happily this was necessitated by every circumstance of the case—once granted that the motives which caused her flight kept their power over her, as Gilbert forced himself to believe they would.

Reasoning so, he did his daily work and lived waiting.

Then came the day which put a term to the mere

blank of desolation, and excited new hopes, new fears. Thyrza's letter arrived. It was delivered in the afternoon, and Lydia found it pushed under her door when she returned from work. She listened for Gilbert's coming home, then ran down to the sitting-room, and, without speaking, put the letter into his hand. Mrs. Grail was present.

'I knew it had come,' she said, in her low voice, which of late had begun to quaver with the feebleness of age. 'Mrs. Jarmey brought it here to show me, because she guessed who it was from.'

Gilbert said very few words, and when he returned the letter, Lydia went upstairs with it, to nurse the treasure in solitude. It lay on her lap, and again and again she read it through. Every word she probed for meanings, every stroke of the pen she dwelt on as possibly revealing something. 'I have been poorly, dear, but I am quite well again now.' That sentence was the one her eye always turned to. The writing was not quite the same as Thyrza's used to be; it showed weakness, she thought. She had foreseen this, that Thyrza would fall ill; in fear of that she had deprived herself of all save the barest necessities, that she might save a little money. But strangers had tended her sister, and with her gladness at receiving news mingled jealousy of the hands that had been preferred to her own. Only now the bitterness of separation seemed to be tasted to the full.

At half-past nine she went downstairs again, know-



ing that she would find Gilbert alone. He was sitting unoccupied, as always now in the evenings, for his books gathered dust on the unregarded shelves. Seeing that she had the letter with her, he held out his hand for it in silence.

‘There’s one thing I’m afraid of,’ Lydia began, when she had glanced at him once or twice. ‘Do you think it’s friends of *his* that she’s with?’

He shook his head.

‘He would have told me if he’d found her.’

‘Are you quite sure?’

‘Yes, I am sure. He wouldn’t have said where she was, very likely, but he’d tell us that she was found.’

Gilbert had reason to think of Lydia as a great power on his side. The girl was now implacable against Egremont. She had ceased to utter her thoughts about him, since she knew that they pained her friend, but in her heart she kept a determined enmity. The fact of Thyrsa’s love in no way influenced her; her imagination was not strong enough to enable her to put herself in Thyrsa’s place and see Egremont as her sister saw him. With the narrowness of view which is common enough in good and warm-hearted women, she could only regard him as the disturber of happiness, the ruin of Thyrsa’s prospects. Lydia was not ambitious; she had never been enthusiastic about Gilbert’s promotion to the librarianship, and doubtless it would have pleased her just as well for Thyrsa to marry Grail if the latter had had no thought of quitting his familiar work. Conse-

quently it was no difficulty to her to leave altogether out of sight Egremont's purposed benefits to Gilbert. She no longer believed that he was innocent of designs in his intercourse with Thyrza. This change was a natural enough consequence of her character, just as it had been perfectly natural for her to think and speak as she had done under the first shock of Thyrza's flight. Then, her instinctive need was to protect her sister's reputation, and to hold firm to the fleeing hope that what had happened was not irreversible. She was, too, still under the influence of Thyrza's own words, of that passionate confession of which it had been impossible to doubt the perfect truthfulness. Since then she had suffered terribly, and the suffering turned her against him who was the plain cause of it. Reason had nothing to do with the matter; women such as Lydia do not reason, they feel, and submit to the rule of impressions. Remember her opinion of Luke Ackroyd in the days when she was bent on Thyrza marrying him; she would have admitted now (to herself) how entirely that judgment had been the result of bias, and have admitted it the more willingly because she loved him and rejoiced to love him in spite of everything. Now, with regard to Egremont, she was influenced as little by her former protests on his behalf as by Gilbert's conviction of his honesty. The end of her brooding over Thyrza's letter was an irremovable suspicion. She dreaded to think that Thyrza had fallen into Egremont's hands. Her sister's



marriage to him would have been hateful to her, for it would have meant final separation from herself.

‘What is the post-mark on the envelope?’ Gilbert asked, Lydia continuing to brood over her jealousies and dreads.

‘Why, I never thought to look!’ she exclaimed. ‘How could I forget that!’

She ran up to her room, and fetched the envelope. The stamp was ‘Charing Cross.’ Small help derivable from that.

‘She doesn’t even say whether she’ll write again,’ Lydia murmured.

Gilbert said presently: ‘I shall write to Mr. Egremont, and tell him that we have heard.’

‘Oh no!’ Lydia protested, indignantly. ‘Why should you tell him? You mustn’t do that, Gilbert; I don’t want him to know.’

‘I promised him, Lyddy. Of course I shouldn’t tell him where she was, if we knew, but I promised to let him hear if we had any news.’

‘Then I don’t see why you promised such a thing. It doesn’t concern him.’

Gilbert was troubled by this persistence. Lydia spoke with earnest disapproval. He could not do as he wished in defiance of her, yet he must certainly keep his promise to Egremont.

‘You must remember,’ he said gently, ‘that he has reason to be anxious, as well as we.’

‘What have we to do with that?’ she replied, stubbornly. ‘He has no right to think anything about her.’

‘I mean, Lyddy, that he is troubled because of our trouble. All I want to do is to tell him that a letter has come from Thyrza, without address, and that she says she has found friends. Won’t you consent to that?’

After a short silence, Lydia replied :

‘I won’t say any more, Gilbert. As you like.’

‘No, that’s not enough. I must have your full agreement. It’s either right or wrong to do it, and you must make up your mind clearly.’

‘I shouldn’t wonder if he knows,’ she said briefly.

‘He doesn’t know. I shall not distrust him again. He would have told me.’

‘Then you had better write.’

‘You see that I ought to?’

‘Yes, as you promised. But I can’t see why you did.’

This form of consent had to suffice, intensely feminine as it was. But Gilbert knew Lydia well by this time, and no trifling fault could touch his deep affection and respect for her.

She was very lonely in these days, Lydia. Of her own sex, she had now no friend, unless it were poor old Mrs. Grail. By changing her place of employment, she had lost even the satisfaction of being among familiar faces, and her new work-mates thought her dull. The jokes and gossip of each morning were things of the past; she plied her needle every moment of the work-

ing day, her thoughts fixed on one unchanging subject. Yes, for she could not really think even of Ackroyd ; he was always, it is true, a presence in her mind, but there was no more pondering about him. Every stitch at the lining of a hat meant a fraction of a coin, and each day's result was to have earned something towards the money saved for Thyrza's assistance.

With Mary Bower she spoke no longer, not even formal words. That insult on the miserable night had been a blow Mary could not soon forgive, for it came just at the moment when, having heard her parents' talk about Thyrza, she was sincerely anxious to reunite herself to her former friend and be what comfort to her she might. So now, whenever Lydia went to see Mr. Boddy, she gave a private signal at the side door, and the old man descended to admit her. Then, Totty Nancarrow. Strangely, Lydia could now have been almost friends with Totty ; she could not have said why. She met her by chance occasionally, and nodded, or at most spoke a brief greeting, yet each time she would have liked to stop and talk a little. Totty had been Thyrza's close friend ; that formerly had been a source of jealous feeling, now it seemed to have become an attraction. Totty gave looks that were not unkind, but did not make advances. She was a little ashamed of the way she had behaved when Lydia came to her for help.

Lydia did not think it necessary to tell Gilbert that she too wanted to let someone know that there was news from Thyrza. After leaving the parlour, she ran

out to a little shop in Kennington Road and purchased a sheet of note-paper and an envelope. Writing a letter was by no means a simple thing to Lyddy; it was after midnight before she had schemed the sentences—or rather, the one long hyper-Attic sentence—in which she should convey her intelligence to Ackroyd. Several things were to be considered in this composition. First, it must be as brief as possible; then, it must be very formal in its mode of address. Both these necessities came of the consideration that the letter would of course be shown to Totty Nancarrow, and Totty must have no cause of complaint. ‘Dear Mr. Ackroyd:—that was written, but might it stand? It meant so much, so much. But how else to begin? Did not everybody begin letters in that way? She really could not say ‘Dear Sir.’ Then—for the letter *must* be finished, the hour was getting so late—‘Yours truly, Lydia Trent.’ Surely that was commonplace enough. Yes, but to say ‘yours’; that too meant so much. Was she not indeed his? And might not Totty suspect something in that ‘yours’? You see that Lyddy was made a very philosopher by love; she had acquired all at once the power of seeing through the outward of things, of perceiving what really lies below our poor conventional shams. Well, the letter had to stand; she had no second sheet of note-paper, and she had no more time, for the weary eyes and hands must get their rest for to-morrow’s toil. She closed the envelope and addressed it; then, the ink being dry, she put the

written name just for an instant to her lips. Totty could not divine that, and it was not so great a wrong. Perhaps Lydia would not have done it, but that the great burden upon her was for the moment lightened, and she longed to tell someone how thankful she was.

Would he reply by letter? Or would he make an opportunity of seeing her? Since the forming of that sudden intimacy under the pressure of misery, he and she had not seen each other often. They always spoke if they met, and Lydia was very grateful to him for the invariable kindness of his voice and his look, but of course it was not to be expected, not to be desired, that they should sustain the habit of conversing together as close friends. Ackroyd had evidently remembered that it was unwise; perhaps he had reported the matter to Totty, with the result that Totty had pronounced a quiet opinion, which it was only becoming in him to respect.

He wrote back; the letter came as speedily as could have been expected. 'Dear Miss Trent,' and 'Yours truly'—even as she had written. How can one write such words and mean nothing by them? But he said, 'Believe me, yours truly'; ah, she would never have ventured upon that! To be sure, it meant nothing, nothing; but she liked that 'Believe me.' He said he was very glad indeed that Thyrza had written, and he hoped earnestly that more satisfactory news would come before long. Very short. Lydia put away the

note with that she had received from the same writer one sad morning in the work-room. How long ago that seemed!

More than a month of summer went by, and Lydia waited still for another word from her sister. After each day's disappointment, she closed her eyes saying, 'It will come to-morrow.' During the hours she spent at home the only event that interested her was the passing of the postman. She watched constantly from the window at the times when letters were delivered, and if, a rare chance, the man in uniform stopped at the door below, she sprang to the top of the stairs and hung there breathless, to see if someone would come up. No, the letter was never for her. On coming home from work she always threw open her door eagerly, for perhaps she would see the white envelope lying on the floor again. The defeat of hope always made the whole room seem barren and cold. Sunday was of all days in the week the longest and gloomiest; on that day there was no postman.

But at length came the evening when, looking down by mere dull habit as she opened her room door, behold the white envelope lay there. She could not believe that at last it was really in her hand. As she took the letter out, there fell from it a light slip of paper; with surprise she saw that it was a post-office order. This time a full address stood at the head of the page.

'Eastbourne!' she uttered. 'Then she is with Mrs. Ormonde, and Mrs. Ormonde is *his* friend.'



Hastily her eyes sought the sense of what was written. Thyrza said that she was well, but could not live longer without seeing her sister. Lydia was to come by as early a train as possible on the following morning; money was enclosed to provide for her expenses. No news could be sent, but in a few hours they would talk to each other. Finally, the address was to be kept a secret, to be kept even from Gilbert; she depended upon Lydia to obey her in this. A postscript added: 'You will easily find the house. I would come to the station and meet every train, but I couldn't bear to see you there first.'

Lydia had deep misgivings, but they did not occupy her mind for long. She was going to see Thyrza; that, as she realised it, rang a peal of joy in her ears and made her forget all else. But the money she would not use; she had enough to pay her fare, and in any case she would somehow have obtained it rather than spend this, which came she knew not from whom. It might be that Thyrza had earned it, but perhaps it was given to her by an enemy—under this name Lydia had come to think of Egremont.

She told Gilbert in private. The concealment from him of Thyrza's address he seemed to accept as something quite natural. He drew a sigh of relief, and as Lydia left him, gave her a look whose meaning was not hard to understand.

The new day did come at last, and at last Lydia was in the train; she had remembered that by which

Thyrza went with Bessie, and she took the same. A strange feeling she had as, instead of going to the work-room, she set off through the sunshine to the railway-station; a holiday feeling, had she known what holiday meant. That she was going for the first time to the sea-side was nothing; her anticipation was only of Thyrza's look and Thyrza's first kiss. Why were all the other people who went by the same train so joyous and so full of hope? Were they too going to meet someone very dear to them?

She had copied the address on to a piece of paper, which she kept inside her glove; impossible that she should forget, but even impossibilities must be provided for. When she descended at Eastbourne, she was so agitated and so perplexed by the novelty of the experience that with difficulty she found her way into the street. She hurried on a little way, then remembered that the first thing was to ask a direction. On inquiring from a woman who stood in a shop-door, she at once had her course clearly indicated. Forwards then, as quickly as she could walk. How astonishingly clean the streets were! What great green trees grew everywhere! How bright and hot was the sunshine!—Yes, this turn; but to make quite sure she would ask again. A policeman, in an unfamiliar uniform, reassured her. Now a turn to the right—and of a sudden everything ceased; there seemed to be nothing but blue sky before her. Ah, that was the sea, then; its breath came with wondrous sweetness on her heated face. But



what was the sea to her ! Along here to the left again. She must be very near now. Again she asked, and in so uncertain a voice that she had to repeat her question before it was understood. Number so-and-so ; why, it was just over yonder ; the cottage that seemed to be built of some glistening white stone. And so she stood at the door.

A child opened, and, without questioning, laughed and said, 'Come in, please.' She found herself at once in a comfortable kitchen. The child pointed to an inner door, which, in the same moment, softly opened.

'Lyddy!'

So it had come at last. Once again they were heart to heart. Lydia cried as though something dreadful had befallen her ; Thyrza sobbed once or twice, but she had shed so many tears for misery that none would come at the bidding of joy.

They were in a little room which looked through a diamond-paned lattice upon the flat beach which lies at this side of Eastbourne. In front was a black, tar-smearred house of wood for the keeping of fishers' nets, and fishing boats lay about it. When Lydia's emotion had spent itself, Thyrza drew her to the window, threw back the lattice, and said 'Look!'

'I can't look at anything but you, dearest,' was the answer.

'But let us look together, just for a minute, then we shall come fresh again to each other's faces. The

sea, Lyddy! I love it; it seems to me the best friend I ever had.'

'You're very pale still, darling. You've been ill, and you wouldn't send for me. How cruel that was of you, Thyrza! You might have got so bad you couldn't send; you might have died before I could know anything. Dear, you don't love me as I love you. I couldn't have given you that pain, no, not for anyone, not for anyone in the world. Oh, why didn't you let me go away with you? I'd have gone anywhere; I'd have done anything you asked me. Are you sure you're well again? Do you feel strong?—What is it?'

Thyrza had let herself sink upon a chair, and her face, which had indeed been strangely colourless, was for a moment touched with pain. But she laughed.

'It's only with exciting myself so, Lyddy. I haven't stood or sat still a minute since I got up. Oh, I'm as well as ever I was, better than ever I was in my life. Don't I look happy? I only wanted you; that was the only thing. I never felt so well and happy.'

Somebody knocked at the door.

'That's something for you to eat after your journey,' said Thyrza. 'It's too early for dinner yet, but you must have just a mouthful.'

She went out and came back with a tray, on which was milk and cake.

Lydia shook her head.

'I can't eat, Thyrza. I want you to tell me everything.'

‘I shan’t tell you anything at all till you’ve had a glass of milk. Let me take your things off. You’re going to stay with me to-night, you know. Sit still, and let me take them off. Dear, good old Lyddy! Oh, will you do my hair for me to-morrow morning? Think of doing my hair again! Don’t, don’t cry any more, dearest love. I’ll kiss away every tear that comes. I want you to look pleased. We won’t talk—about things, just yet. It isn’t all happiness; I know that, dear, I know it too well. I oughtn’t really to be happy at all. But you’re with me once more, my precious, and I can’t think of anything yet. Yes, just this half glass of milk. You don’t know what it’s like; you never tasted milk like that. Sweet? *Isn’t* it sweet? Real milk; I should like never to drink anything else. Now, you see, you feel better for that already. Poor old Lyddy, you always did cry when you were glad, and never for anything else. Shall I sit on your lap, like I used to do after I’d been naughty, years and years ago? Oh, years and years; you don’t know how old I am, Lyddy. You don’t think you’re still older than me, do you? No, that’s all altered. Mrs. Guest here asked me how old I was the other day, and I wouldn’t tell her, because the truth wasn’t true. Ah, how good it is to have no strength of my own, and just lie with your arms to hold me! I was so ill, Lyddy dear; I did think I should die, and I should have wished to, but for you. I couldn’t send for you: I was ashamed to. I’d behaved too bad to you and to everybody. But people

were kind, much kinder than they'd need have been. Some day I'll go and see Mrs. Gandle and tell her I haven't forgotten her kindness. You shall go with me, Lyddy. But no, no; you wouldn't like. We'll forget all about that.'

'Where was that, Thyrza?'

'A place where I got work. Do you know where the Caledonian Road is? You've heard of it, haven't you?'

'But what work was it?'

'Oh, just to help with things—in the house, you know. If she'd refused me that night, I'd have had to sleep in the street. I couldn't have gone a bit further. And I was that ashamed—oh, I could have died of shame! If ever I've a penny, I'll never refuse it to anyone that begs; you can't tell what they may be feeling.'

Lydia tightened her embrace, as if shame and hardship still threatened her dear one and she would guard her from them.

'But how did you get better? What happened then?'

'When I was very bad, Mrs. Gandle one night looked in my pocket to see if I'd anything about me to show where I belonged. And she found that bit of paper with Mrs. Ormonde's name and address. But wait, Lyddy; I've something to say. Did you do as I asked, about not telling anyone where I was?'

‘I didn’t tell anyone, Thyrza. Nobody knew where I was going. I mean, of course I told Gilbert that I was going to you, but not where you were.’

Thyrza, after a short pause, asked very quietly :

‘How is Gilbert, Lyddy?’

‘He seems pretty well, dear.’

‘Has he—has he felt it very hard?’

She kept her eyes veiled, and pressed her head closer to Lydia’s shoulder.

‘He’s had a great deal to go through, dear.’

The touch of severity in Lydia’s voice came of her thoughts turning to Egremont. But Thyrza felt herself judged and rebuked; she trembled.

‘What is he doing?’ she asked, in a voice barely audible.

‘He goes to work, as usual. It’s a new place.’

‘Poor Gilbert! Oh, I’m sorry for him! He never deserved this of me. Lyddy,’ she added in a whisper, ‘it makes you so cruel to other people when you love anyone.’

Lydia found no answer. She was gazing through the open window, but saw nothing of sea or sky. She, then, did not know what it was to love? Well, love is of many kinds.

‘But I was going to say something, Lyddy,’ Thyrza pursued, when a kiss upon her hair assured her that from one at all events there was no need to ask forgiveness. ‘It’s Mrs. Ormonde that has done everything for me, and she doesn’t want anybody to know—nobody except

you. She's very kind, but—she's a little hard in some things, and she thinks—I can't quite explain it all. Will you promise not to tell anyone when you go back?'

'But are you going to stay here, Thyrza?'

'No, dear; I'm going to London. Mrs. Ormonde is going to send me to some friends of hers. I'm not allowed to tell you where it is, and you won't be able to come and see me there; but we shall see each other somewhere sometimes. You'll keep it secret?'

'Then we're going to be parted always?' Lydia asked, slowly.

'No, no; not always, dear sister. Just for a time; oh, not long. I told Mrs. Ormonde that I knew you'd do as I asked.'

'Thyrza,' said the other gravely, 'I broke the other promise. I showed Gilbert the letter you left for me, and I told him all you'd told me.'

'Yes,' Thyrza uttered mechanically.

'It couldn't be helped. People had begun to talk, and Gilbert had heard about—about the library, you know. Mrs. Bower got to know somehow.'

'Lyddy, I told you all the truth; I told you every word of the truth!'

'I'm sure you did, Thyrza—all you knew.'

'Everything! What did people say about me? No, I don't want to hear; don't tell me. That's all over now. And you couldn't help telling Gilbert; I under-

stand how it was. But will you promise me this other thing, Lyddy?’

She raised herself, and looked solemnly into her sister’s face.

‘It’ll mean more to me than you think, if you refuse, or if you break your promise. I don’t think you would do me harm, Lyddy?’

The answer was long in coming. At last Lydia made inquiry :

‘Why does Mrs. Ormonde want to hide you?’

Thyrza grew agitated.

‘She means it for my good. She believes she’s doing the best. She’s been kind to me, and I can’t say a word against her. I think I ought to do as she wants. She seems to like me, only—I can’t tell you how it is, Lyddy; I can’t tell anyone; no, not even you!’

‘Don’t worry yourself so, dearest.’

‘Lyddy, you might promise me!’ Thyrza went on, shaken with emotion, one would have said, with fear. ‘I’ve done wrong to you and to Gilbert, but do try and forgive me.’ Why are you so quiet? Haven’t you love enough for me to do just this?’

She stood up, flushed and with wild eyes.

‘Be quiet, Thyrza dearest!’ pleaded her sister.

‘Then answer me, Lyddy! Promise me!’

‘I want to know one thing first. Have you seen Mr. Egremont?’

‘I haven’t spoken to him since that night when I



said good-bye to him by the river. Can't you believe me?'

'I don't think you'd tell me an untruth.'

'If I'd spoken to him, Lyddy, I'd tell you at once; I would! I'd tell you everything!'

'I must say what I mean, Thyrza; it's no good doing anything else. Tell me this: does Mrs. Ormonde want you to marry him?'

Thyrza laughed strangely. Then she exclaimed:

'She doesn't! She wouldn't hear of such a thing, not for the world! She wants to be kind to me in her own way, but not that; not that! How you distrust me! Are *you* against me, then? What are you thinking about? I hoped you would be kind to me in everything. You don't look like my Lyddy, now.'

'It's because I don't understand you,' said the other, in a subdued voice, her eyes on the ground. 'You're not open with me, Thyrza. If it's true that Mrs. Ormonde thinks in that way, why do you——'

She broke off.

'I can't talk about it! It's very hard to bear. We shall never be what we were to each other, Thyrza. Something's come between us, and it always will be between us. You must take your own way, dear. Yes, I promise, and there's an end of it.'

Thyrza sprang forward.

'What is it you're afraid of?' she pleaded. 'Why do you speak like this? What are you thinking?'



‘I think that Mr. Egremont ‘ll know where you are.’

‘Lyddy, he won’t know! I give you my solemn word he won’t know.’

‘Do you write to him? Perhaps you meant that, when you said you hadn’t *spoken* to him?’

‘I meant what I said, that I’ve neither written nor spoken, nor him to me. He won’t know where I am; I shall have nothing to do with him in any way. But of course if you refuse to believe me, what’s the use of saying it!’

There was a strange intonation in Thyrza’s voice as she added these words. She looked and spoke with a certain pride, which Lydia had never before remarked in her. Lydia mused a little, then said:

‘I don’t doubt the truth of your words, Thyrza. I promise not to tell anyone anything about you, and I’ll keep my promise. But can’t you tell me what you’re going to do?’

‘I don’t really know myself. Mrs. Ormonde took me to her house the day before yesterday, and there was a lady there that I had to sing to. I think she wanted to see what sort of a voice I had. She played a sound on the piano, and asked me to sing the same, if I could. She seemed satisfied, I thought, though she didn’t say anything. Then Mrs. Ormonde brought me back in her carriage, but she didn’t say anything about the singing. She’s very strange in some things, you know.’

Lydia asked presently :

‘Then was it Mrs. Ormonde gave you this money?’

And she took the post-office order from her pocket.

‘What! you didn’t use it?’

‘No; I had enough of my own. Please give it back.’

‘Oh, Lyddy, how proud you are! You never would take any help from anybody, and yet you went on so about grandad when he made bother. Oh, how is poor grandad?’

‘The same as usual, dear.’

‘And you go to work every day just the same? My poor Lyddy! Dearest, dearest, if I could only wake up and find it had all been a dream! Oh, if I could go to work with you again, and think about nothing but how to save a little money for clothing! We used to be happy, Lyddy. You were a dear good mother to me. We used to talk so much about what we should buy for dinner, and where we could get cheap things—didn’t we? And I was often discontented, and I thought I had hard things to put up with! Silly child!’

The contention was over, and the tenderness came back.

‘Speak something for me to Gilbert, Lyddy! Say I—what can I say? I do feel for him; I can never forget his goodness as long as I live. Tell him to forget all about me. How wrong I was ever to say that I loved him!’

Then again, in a whisper :

‘What about Mr. Ackroyd, dearest?’

‘The same. They’re not married yet. I dare say they will be soon.’

They spent long hours together by the ebb and flow of the tide. Lydia almost forgot her troubles now and then. As for Thyrza, she seemed to drink ecstasy from the live air.

‘It’s a good friend to me,’ she said several times, looking out upon the grey old deep. ‘It’s made me well again, Lyddy. I shall always love the sound of it, and the salt taste on my lips!’

## CHAPTER II.

## MOVEMENTS.

‘WE are going first of all to the Pilkingtons’, in Warwickshire,’ said Annabel, talking with Mrs. Ormonde at the latter’s hotel in the last week of July. ‘Mr. Lanyard—the poet, you know—will be there; I am curious to see him. Father remembers him a “scrubby starveling”—to use his phrase—a reviewer of novels for some literary paper. He has just married Lady Emily Quell—you heard of it? How paltry it is for people to laugh and sneer whenever a poor man marries a rich woman! I know nothing of him except from his poetry, but that convinces me that he is above sordid motives.’

‘Then you do still retain some of your idealism, Bell?’

‘All that I ever had, I hope. Why? You have feared for me?’

‘Pitch! Pitch!’

‘Yes, I know,’ Annabel answered, rather absently, letting her eyes stray. ‘Never mind. You had something particular to say to me, Mrs. Ormonde.’

‘Yes, I have a good-bye for you from an old acquaintance.’

Annabel’s complexion had not borne the season as well as those of women whose whole and sole preoccupation it is to combat nature in the matter of their personal appearance. Her tint was, as they say, a little fatigued. Fatigued, too, were her eyes, which seemed ever looking for something lost; that gaze she had in sitting by Ullswater with ‘Sesame and Lilies’ on her lap would not be easily recovered. Her beauty was of rarer quality and infinitely more suggestive than on that day something more than a year ago; to the modern mind nothing is complete that has not an element of morbidity. At Mrs. Ormonde’s words she turned with grave interest.

‘Where, then, is he going?’ she asked, just smiling.

‘To a small manufacturing town in Pennsylvania. His firm has just opened works there, and he has it in view to prepare himself for superintending them.’

‘You are serious?’

‘Quite. I think it was chiefly my persuasion that decided him. I have no doubt that in a year or two he will thank me, though he is not very ardent about it at present.’

‘But surely he—— No, I think you are right.’

‘I have not advised him to become an American,’ Mrs. Ormonde continued, smiling, when Annabel abandoned an apparent intention of saying more. ‘No

doubt he will come to England now and then, and probably, with his disposition, he will some day make his home here again. I hardly expect to see him for some two years.'

'I hope it is right. I think it is.'

Annabel paused a little, then made an unforced transition to other matters. She rose to leave before long. Whilst her hand was in Mrs. Ormonde's, she asked :

'May I know anything more than father told me?'

She had said it with a little difficulty, but without confusion of face.

'What did your father tell you?'

'Only that she is in your care, and that you think her voice can be cultivated, so as to serve her.'

'Yes, I will tell you more than that, dear. He is absolutely without bond as regards her. They have never met since her flight from home, and, more, she has no suspicion that he ever took an interest in her save as Mr. Grail's future wife.'

'She does not know that?'

'She has no idea of it. They have never exchanged a more than friendly word. He believed, when absent from England, that she was already married, and of *his* movements since then she is wholly ignorant.'

She listened with frank surprise; her face showed nothing more than that.

'But,' she said, hesitatingly, 'I cannot quite understand. He holds himself quite without responsibility? He leaves England without troubling about her future?'

‘Not at all. He knows I have her in my care. She being my ward, I have a perfect right to demand that the child’s fate shall not be trifled with, that she shall be allowed to grow older and wiser before anyone asks her to take an irrevocable step—say for the space of two years. Mr. Egremont grants my right, and I have never yet had real grounds for doubting his honour.’

‘I never doubted it, even on seeming grounds,’ said Annabel, quietly.

‘You are justified, Bell. Well, as you asked me, I thought it better to tell you thus much. He leaves England morally as free as if he had never heard her name.’

‘One more question. How do you *know* that she has no assurance of his—affection?’

‘He has himself told me that there has been not a word of that between them. The only other possible source was her sister, who has seen her. I did not see Lydia before the interview, because it was repugnant to me to do so; their love for each other is something very sacred, and a stranger had no right to come between them before they met. But I subsequently saw Lydia in London. She soon spoke to me very freely, and I found that she almost hated me because she thought I was planning to marry her sister to Mr. Egremont. I also found out—I am old, you know, Bell, and can be very deceitful—that Lydia, no more than her sister, suspects serious feeling on his part.

She scorned the suggestion of such a possibility. It is her greatest hope that Thyrza may yet marry Mr. Grail.'

'And what can you tell me of Thyrza herself?'

'She has been ill, but seems now in very fair health. The day she spent with Lydia evidently did her a vast amount of good. That natural affection is an invaluable resource to her, and, if I am not mistaken, it will be the means of recovering happiness for me. She is quiet, but not seriously depressed—sometimes she is even bright. The singing lessons have begun, and she enjoys them; I think a new interest has been given her.'

'Then I hope a very sad beautiful face will no longer haunt me.'

Thus did two ladies transact the most weighty part of their business after shaking hands for good-bye—an analogy to the proverbial postscript, perhaps.

The same evening there was a dinner-party at the Tyrrells'. Mr. Newthorpe had, as usual, kept to his own room. Annabel went thither to sit with him for a while after the visitors were gone.

He had a poem that he wished to read to her; there was generally some scrap of prose or verse waiting for her when she went into the study. To-night Annabel could not give the usual attention. Mr. Newthorpe noticed this, and, laying the book aside, made one or two inquiries about the company of the evening. She replied briefly, then, after hesitation, asked:



‘Do you very much want to go to the Pilkingtons’, father?’

He regarded her with amazement.

‘I? Since when have I had a passionate desire to camp in strangers’ houses and eat strange flesh?’

‘Then you do *not* greatly care about it—even for the sake of meeting Mr. Lanyard?’

‘Lanyard? Great Heavens! The fellow has done some fine things, but spiritual converse with him is quite enough for me.’

‘Then will you please to discover all at once that you are really not so well as you thought, and that, after your season’s dancing and theatre-going, you feel obliged to get back either to Eastbourne or Ullswater as soon as possible?’

‘The fact is, Bell, I haven’t felt by any means up to the mark these last few days.’

‘Dear father, don’t say that! I am wrong to speak lightly of such things.’

‘I only say it because you ask me to, sweet-and-twenty. In truth I feel very comfortable, but I shall be far more sure of remaining so at Eastbourne than at the Pilkingtons.’

‘Eastbourne, you think?’

‘Nay, as you please, Bell.’

‘Yes, Eastbourne again.’ She came to her father and took his hands. ‘I’m tired, tired, tired of it all, dear; tired and weary unutterably! If ever we come to London again, let us tell nobody, and take

quiet rooms in some shabby quarter, and go to the National Gallery, and to the marbles at the Museum, and all places where we are sure of never meeting a soul who belongs to the fashionable world. If we go to a concert, we'll sit in the gallery, among people who come because they really want to hear music——'

'*Eheu!* The stairs are portentous, Bell!'

'Never mind the stairs! Nay then, we won't go to public concerts at all, but I will play for you and myself, beginning when we like, and leaving off when we like, and using imagination—thank goodness, we both have some!—to make up for the defects. We'll go back to our books—oh! *you* have never left them; but I, poor sinner that I am——! Give me my Dante, and let me feel him between my hands! Where is Virgil?

*Heu! fuge crudeles terras, fuge litus avarum;*

Is it quoted right? Is it apropos?'

'Savonarola's word of fate.'

'Then mine too! How have you been so patient with me? A London season—and I still have Homer to read! Still have Sophocles for an unknown land! My father, I have gone far, very far, astray, and you did not so much as rebuke me.'

'My dearest, it is infinitely better to hear you rebuke yourself. Nor that, either. A chapter in your education was lacking; now you can go on smoothly.'

'Now read the poem over again, father. I can hear it now.'

Paula came to the house next morning. She and Annabel had seen very little of each other throughout the season, but, on the last two or three occasions of their meeting, Paula had betrayed a sort of timid desire to speak with more intimacy than was her wont. Annabel was not eager in response, but, in spite of that letter which you remember, she had always judged her cousin with much tolerance, and a suspicion that Paula Dalmaine was not quite so happy a person as Paula Tyrrell had been, inclined her to speak with gentleness. They were alone together this morning in the drawing-room.

‘So you’re going to the Pilkingtons,’ Paula said, when she had fluttered about a good deal.

‘No. We have changed our minds. We go back to Eastbourne.’

‘Ah! How’s that, Bell?’

‘We are a little tired of society, and father needs quietness again. Where do you go?’

‘To Scotland, with the Scalpers. Lord Glenroich is going down with us. He’s promised to teach me to shoot.’

Paula spoke of these arrangements with less gusto than might have been expected of her. She was fidgety and absent. Suddenly she asked:

‘What has become of Mr. Egremont, Bell?’

‘He has either gone, or is just going, to America, to live there, I believe, for some time.’

‘Oh, indeed!—*with* anybody, I wonder?’

‘He has not told me anything of his affairs, Paula.’

‘Then you have seen him?’

‘No, I haven’t.’

‘Don’t be cross with me, Bell. I don’t mean anything. I only wanted to know something true about him; I can hear lies enough whenever I choose.’

It was pathetic enough, because, for once, evidently sincere. Annabel smiled and made no reply. Then, with abrupt change of subject, Paula remarked:

‘I think I shall come and see you at Eastbourne, if you’ll let me.’

‘I shall be glad.’

‘No, you won’t exactly be glad, Bell—but, of course, I know you couldn’t say you’ll be sorry. Still, I shall come, for a day or two, all by myself.’

‘Come, and heartily welcome, Paula.’

‘Well now, that does sound a little different. I don’t often hear people speak like that.’

She nodded a careless good-bye, and at once left the house. She went straight home. Mr. Dalmaine was absent at luncheon-time; Paula ate nothing and talked fretfully to the servant about the provision that was made for her—though she never took the least trouble to see that her domestic concerns went properly. She idled about the drawing-room till three o’clock. A visitor came; her instructions were: ‘Not at home.’ At half-past three she ordered a hansom to be summoned, instead of her own carriage, and, having dressed with nervous rapidity, she

ran downstairs and entered the vehicle. 'Drive to the British Museum,' she spoke up to the cabman through the trap.

But just as the horse was starting, it stopped again. Looking about her in annoyance, she found that her husband had bidden the driver pull up, and that he was standing by the wheel.

'Where are you going?' he asked, smilingly.

'To see a friend. Why do you stop me when I'm in a hurry? Tell him to drive on at once.'

She was obeyed, and, as the vehicle rolled on, she leaned back, suffering a little from palpitation. It was a long drive to Great Russell Street, and once or twice she all but altered her direction to the man. However, she was on the pavement by the Museum gates at last. When the cab had driven away, she crossed the street. She went to the house where Egremont had his rooms.

Yes, Mr. Egremont was at home.

'Then please to give him this card, and ask if he is at liberty.'

She was guided up to the first floor; she entered a room, and found Egremont standing in the midst of packing-cases. He affected to be in no way surprised at the visit, and shook hands naturally.

'You find me in a state of disorder, Mrs. Dalmaine,' he said. 'Pray excuse it; I start on a long journey to-morrow morning.'

Paula murmured phrases. She was hot, and wished

in her heart that she had not done this crazy thing ; really she could not quite say why she had done it.

‘ So you’re going to America again, Mr. Egremont ? ’

‘ Yes.’

‘ I heard so. I knew you wouldn’t come to say good-bye to me, so I came to you.’

She was looking about for signs of female occupation ; none whatever were discoverable.

‘ You are kind.’

‘ I won’t stay, of course. You are very busy——’

‘ I hope you will let me give you a cup of tea ? ’

‘ Oh no, thank you. It was only just to speak a word—and to ask you to forget some very bad behaviour of mine. You know what I mean, of course. I was ashamed of myself, but I couldn’t help it. I’m so glad I came just in time to see you ; I should have been awfully vexed if I—if I couldn’t have asked you to forgive me.’

‘ I have nothing whatever to forgive, but I think it very kind of you to have come.’

‘ You’ll come back again—some day ? ’

‘ Very likely, I think.’

‘ Then I’ll say good-bye.’

He looked into her face, and saw how pretty and sweet it was, and felt sorry for her—he did not know why. Their hands held together a moment or two.

‘ There’s no—no message I can deliver for you, Mr. Egremont ? I’m to be trusted—I am, indeed.’

‘I’m very sure you are, Miss Tyrrell—oh, pardon me!’

‘No, no! I shan’t forgive you.’ She was laughing, yet almost crying at the same time. ‘You must ask me to do something for you, in return for that. How strange that did seem! It was like having been dead and coming to life again, wasn’t it?’

‘I have no message whatever for anybody, Mrs. Dalmaine; thank you very much.’

‘Good-bye, then. No, no, don’t come down. Good-bye!’

She drove back home.

She had been sitting for an hour in her boudoir, when Dalmaine came in. He smiled, but looked rather grim for all that. Seating himself opposite her, he asked:

‘Paula, what was your business in Great Russell Street this afternoon?’

She trembled, but returned his gaze scornfully.

‘So you followed me?’

‘I followed you. It is not exactly usual, I believe, for young married ladies to visit men in their rooms; if I have misunderstood the social rules in this matter, you will of course correct me.’

‘I go where I like, rules or no rules.’

‘Ah!’ He put on a very grave, grieved air. ‘Then I shall consider it my duty to get legal advice on this matter. I shall of course be very sorry to put you in a disagreeable position, but I see no alternative. Probably, out of consideration, I shall tell your parents



what I am about to do, and, when they understand the very grave nature of my evidence, no doubt——’

Paula was white. She had not one atom of real courage in her soul, poor child, and the man found it easy enough, under the circumstances, to terrify her.

‘You won’t do that!’ she said, hurriedly. ‘You know you daren’t do that! It would be too mean.’ She wished to add ‘even for you,’ but durst not. ‘You know perfectly well there was no harm in what I did; you know it as well as I do.’

‘Indeed, I know nothing of the kind.’

‘Then you are very bad-hearted to suspect me.’

She was crying now. Her health was not quite equal to a scene of this kind. The season had overtaxed her, and a secret unhappiness had wrought upon her nerves more than she understood. Poor little doll of fashion, face to face at length with a misery as real as tiger’s claws! And she was so pretty, looked so helplessly resentful of fate, that most men, even most husbands, would have kissed the tears from her eyes and have bidden her try and be foolishly happy.

Mr. Dalmaine was to the core a politician. He was fond of Paula in a way, but he had discovered since his marriage that she had a certain individuality very distinct from his own, and till this was crushed he could not be satisfied. It was his home policy, at present, to crush Paula’s will. He practised upon her the faculties which he would have liked to use in terrorizing a people.



Since she had given up talking politics, her drawing-room had been full of people whom Dalmaine regarded with contempt—mere butterflies of the season. She had aggressively emphasised the difference between his social tastes and hers. He bore with it temporarily, till he could elaborate a plan of campaign. Now the plan had formed itself in most unhoped completeness, and he was happy.

‘What did you want with that fellow?’ he asked, coldly.

‘Mr. Egremont is going to America, and I wanted to say good-bye to him. He was my friend long before I knew you.’

‘Precisely. I had better remind you that the substance of this conversation will probably have to be written down and submitted to my legal advisers.’

‘Why didn’t you go into the house after me,’ she exclaimed, ‘and listen to what we said? You might as well have done that, whilst you were about it. Think what you like.’

She rose, and would have gone; but he stopped her with a gentle hand.

‘Paula, this is very unsatisfactory. If you go away now, I leave the house and refuse to have any more communication with you, except through the lawyers.’

‘What do you want? What am I to do?’

‘To sit down and listen. As I have such very grave grounds for distrusting you, I can only pursue one course. I must claim your entire obedience to certain

commands I am now going to detail. Refusal will, of course, drive me to the most painful extremities.'

'What do you want?'

'To-morrow you were to give your last dinner-party. You will at once send a notice to all your guests that you are ill and cannot receive them.'

'Absurd! How can I do such a thing?'

'You will do it. We spoke of going to Scotland with the Scalpers. Instead of that, you accompany me to Manchester when Parliament rises, and you live with me there in retirement whilst I am occupied with my study of the factory questions which immediately interest me.'

Paula was silent.

'These are my commands. The alternative to obedience is—you know what. Pray let me know your decision.'

'Why do you behave to me in this way? What have I done to be treated like this?'

'Pray do not ask me. I wait for your answer.'

'I can only give in to you, and you're coward enough to take advantage of it.'

'You undertake to obey me?'

'Yes—and to hate you to my last day!'

'There, of course, I can exact nothing. I am very far from hating you, Paula, and I have no doubt the day will come when you will smile at yourself for having spoken so thoughtlessly.'

‘I want to go to my room. Can I do so without asking?’

‘You are mistress of my house, Paula, as long as you obey me in essential matters.’

Paula disappeared, and Mr. Dalmaine sat reflecting with much self-approbation on the firmness and suavity he had displayed.

## CHAPTER III.

## AN OLD MAN'S REST.

It was not without much reluctance, much debate with conscience, that Bunce allowed his child to remain at Eastbourne. He could not, of course, have finally refused consent to a plan which might be the means of saving Bessie's life, and to be relieved of the cost of her support, receiving into the bargain a small monthly sum which Mrs. Ormonde represented as the value to her of Bessie's services at The Chestnuts, was a great consideration to a man in his perpetual state of struggle to make ends meet. But he had a suspicion that Mrs. Ormonde desired to get the girl away from him that Bessie might be, as he would have phrased it, perverted to the debasing superstition of Christianity. To say that the man was both impious and obstinate by no means disposes of the matter. It was a fact that his soul revolted at the thought of his child learning to say prayers and sing hymns and perchance beginning to write letters with the object of saving her lost parent. He was the kind of man whom a little judiciously directed persecution would have driven to the point of sacrificing his life for his

unbelief. And the issue of Egremont's activity in Lambeth seemed to have the effect of heightening the frenzy with which he regarded all suggestions of a compromise with the old religion; in conclave with Luke Ackroyd and Totty Nancarrow he was brought to a firm belief, if not in Egremont's rascality, at all events in his unpardonable weakness. 'There you are!' cried Bunce. 'There's the result of a man not knowing his own mind. He said he wasn't a Christian, and he defended Christianity; he sneered at atheists, and yet seemed to be an atheist himself. It was all words with him. If it comes to that, I prefer a downright Christian; at all events you know where to have him.'

He talked of the *old* religion, implying that he had a new one of his own. And he believed that he had. He was convinced, for example, that the rules of conscience to which he adhered would never have suffered him to do a thing such as Egremont had been guilty of; whereas the old faith seemed to him wholly inadequate to keep a man upright in dealings with his fellow mortals. Since he had risen out of the slough into which his miserable marriage had gradually sunk him, he was become a man of absolute honesty in word and deed. Amid his darkness there did indubitably gleam some small fixed light towards which his intellect and his emotions strove. But it was sadly certain that, as regarded him, the result of Egremont's endeavours was a negative quantity; instead of being sweetened to charity, he had found a new bugbear against which to direct all the vehemence of his

turbulent nature. Henceforth any eirenicon of the kind Egremont had attempted would not even get a momentary hearing through the tumult of his scorn. I think it little likely that Bunce would in any hands have become a model of historical impartiality, but he *had* brains and he had a good heart, and it was a pity to see him misusing the one and the other. Even yet things were not hopeless with him, but if he was to be helped it must be henceforth by another way than appeal to his instincts of æsthetic justice.

Mrs. Ormonde had her interviews with him, and it helped her to understand the man. She soon found out what it was that troubled him, and went directly to the point with an assurance that no attempt whatever should be made to prejudice Bessie against her father's views. Any printed matter he chose to send her would be uninterfered with. Another woman would have thought Bunce a mere bear when she parted with him, but Mrs. Ormonde had that blessed gift of divination which comes of vast charity; she did not misjudge him. And he in turn, though he went away with his face still set in the look of half-aggressive pride which it had assumed when he entered, found in a day or two that Mrs. Ormonde's tones made a memory as pleasant as any he had. He felt a little uncomfortable in remembering how ungraciously he had borne himself.

Your stubborn insurgent, your man of hungry heart and mind, who curses with most violence all the

world's smooth lies and hypocritical cruelties, will always be most amenable to the starry influence of a noble woman.

Another woman there was who had begun to exercise influence of an indefinable kind on the rugged fellow, a woman whom he saw a good deal of, and to whom he had grown accustomed to look for a good deal of help. This was Miss Totty Nancarrow. You must not smile when I pass abruptly from Mrs. Ormonde to Totty. I have wrought very imperfectly if you do not like Totty Nancarrow, if you do not feel that she is really a woman, and therefore not unworthy of our attention after whomsoever other of her sex. Nay, it is true you must be the reader whom I have in mind, he who cares not where a woman live, or what form of language be on her lips, so that she look out of womanly eyes and have in her that something which is the potentiality of love. For you only; the others will go their way uncomprehending; and indeed I care not. Well, Totty was no slight help with little Nelly, and even with Jack. For the former she ceased to be 'Miss Nanco,' and became 'Totty' simply; to Jack she was a most estimable acquaintance, who never grudged flattering wonder at his school achievements, even though they involved no more than a mastery of compound multiplication, and occasionally he felt a wish that some one of his schoolfellows would call Miss Nancarrow names, that he might punch the rascal's head. But in the father's mind there was an



obstacle to complete appreciation. Totty was a Roman Catholic. She often went to St. George's Cathedral, in Southwark, and even for the purpose of confession. When this fact was strongly before Bunce's consciousness, he was inclined to scorn Totty and to feel an uneasiness about her associating with his children. Somehow, the scorn and the mistrust would not hold out in Totty's presence. He found himself taking more pains to be polite to her than to any other person. When she had had Nelly in her room, and brought the child to him on his coming home, he invented excuses to get her to talk for a few moments. Unfortunately, Totty appeared little disposed to talk.

Luke Ackroyd was not infrequently in Bunce's room. These two discussed religion and politics together, and their remarks on these subjects lacked neither vigour nor perspicuity. Ye gods! how they went to the root of things! Ackroyd had persevered in his pronounced antinomianism; he did not take life as 'hard' as his companion, and consequently was not as sincere in his revolt, but he represented very fairly the modern type of brain-endowed workman, who is from birth at issue with the lingering old world. That is, he represented it intellectually; there was, however, much in his character which does not mark the proletarian as such. Essentially his nature was very gentle and ductile, and he had strong affections. Probably he could not have told you, with any approach to accuracy, how often he had been in love, or fancied himself so,



and for Ackroyd being in love was, to tell the truth, a matter of vastly more importance than all the political and social and religious questions in the world. It is a view for which something may be said.

He and Totty were still on the terms of that compact which had Christmas in view. His own part was discharged conscientiously ; he visited no public-houses and was steady at his work. In fact, he had never had those tastes which bring a man to hopeless sottishness. More than half his dissipation had come of that kind of vanity whereof young gentlemen of the best families have by no means the monopoly. He liked people to talk about him ; he liked to know that it was deemed a pity for such a clever young fellow to go to the dogs. Even in his recklessness after the loss of Thyrza there was much of this element ; disappointment in love is known to make one interesting, and if Luke could have brought on a mild fever, so that people could say he was in danger of dying, it would probably not have displeased him. That was over now. He persuaded himself that he was in love with Totty, and he told himself daily how glad he was in the thought of marrying her shortly after Christmas.

For all that, they quarrelled, he and she. It would not be easy to say how many times they quarrelled and made it up again during the latter half of the year. There was a certain unlikeness of temperament, which perpetually made them think more of their difficulties in getting on together than of the pleasure they

received from each other's society. Ackroyd frequently pondered on the question of how this matter would arrange itself after they were married; at times he was secretly not a little alarmed. As his wont was, he talked over the question exhaustively with his sister, Mrs. Poole. The latter for a time refused to converse on the subject at all. She was by no means sure that Miss Nancarrow was in any sense a desirable acquisition to the family, having conceived a great prejudice against her from the night when Ackroyd had dealings with the police. A hint to this effect led to a furious outbreak on Luke's part; he was insulted, he would leave the house and find quarters elsewhere, his sister was a narrow-minded, calumniating woman. He was bidden to take his departure as soon as he liked, but somehow he did not do so. Then Mrs. Poole got her husband to make private inquiries about Miss Nancarrow. Good-natured Jim obeyed her, and had to confess that the report was tolerable enough; the girl was perhaps a little harum-scarum, no worse.

'Oh, you're always so soft when there's talk about women!' exclaimed his wife, disappointed. 'I declare you're as bad as Luke himself. I shall see what I can find out for myself.'

She too found that no evil report was current about Totty, save that she was a Roman Catholic. To be sure, this was bad enough, but could not perhaps be made a ground of serious objection to the girl. So Mrs. Poole fell back on an old line of argument.

‘I’m tired of hearing about your girls!’ she exclaimed, when Luke next broached the subject. ‘When it ain’t one, it’s another. You must find somebody else to talk to. One thing I *do* know—if I was a girl, I wouldn’t marry you, no, not if you’d a fortune.’

But in the end she yielded, for she saw that the matter was serious.

‘I want to bring Totty here,’ Luke said one night. ‘I can’t always see her in the street, and there’s no other handy place. What do you say, Jane?’

‘You must do as you like. There’s the parlour you’re welcome to. But you mustn’t go bringing her down here, mind. I’ve an idea her and me won’t quite hit it. You’re welcome to the parlour.’

Further quarrels and reconcilements led to a modification of this standpoint; Mrs. Poole at length said that she was willing to be introduced to Totty, and sent an invitation to tea for Sunday evening.

‘Let him get married, and have done with it,’ she said to her husband. ‘I shall have no peace till he does. He worrits my life out.’

‘He’ll worrit you a good deal more afterwards, if I’m not mistook,’ remarked Jim, with a dry chuckle.

But an unforeseen difficulty presented itself. Totty positively declined to visit Mrs. Poole at present. There was plenty of time for that, she said; wait till Christmas was nearer.

So Ackroyd and Totty once more fell out, and this time very gravely. For a fortnight they did not see

each other. And even when the inevitable renewal of kindness came about, Totty made it a condition that she must not be asked to visit Mrs. Poole. Time enough for that.

Mrs. Poole was, of course, offended. It took her longer than a fortnight before she could hear any reference to Totty.

Early in December Totty had a bit of news to impart which gave Ackroyd a good deal of anxiety. She had been talking with Mrs. Bower, and that lady had as good as said that she could no longer keep old Mr. Boddy in her house.

‘He’s three weeks behind with his rent,’ Totty said, ‘and he’s sold everything he had to sell, except his fiddle, to pay even so long.’

‘But do you think Lydia Trent knows that?’

‘I can’t say. I should think most likely she doesn’t. She’s nothing to do with none of the Bowers, and hasn’t had for a long time; and you may be quite sure Mr. Boddy wouldn’t be the first to tell her how things was. Thyrza often said what work they had to get him to take anything from them.’

‘He’s got no work then?’

‘Only a shilling now and then. Mrs. Bower says he’s getting too slow for the people as employed him. I shouldn’t wonder if he’s as good as starved most days.’

‘What brutes those Bowers are! And now, I suppose, they’re going to turn the old man into the street.

That's the Christianity that their girl has taught them. I tell you what, I'll see if I can't find a bit of something for him to do. But then, what's the good? It'll only keep him a day or two. Lydia 'll have to be told about it.'

'It's all very well,' remarked Totty, 'but I don't see how she's to keep him. Besides, I think she might have found out for herself how things was going before now.'

'You may depend upon it, it's only because the old man's hidden it from her so that she couldn't have an idea. I don't like to hear you speak like that of Lydia, Totty.'

'I don't see that there's any harm in what I said.'

'Well, I know you didn't mean it to be unkind, but it sounded so.'

'You're always very sharp about Lydia.'

'I know I am. She's a good girl, and she's a great deal to bear. I think everybody ought to respect her.'

It was perilously near a misunderstanding, but Totty was not altogether in earnest, and had good sense enough to refrain from unworthy suggestions on such a subject. Ackroyd had sometimes half suspected that she quarrelled on trivial grounds of set purpose, for he was well aware of her native sincerity and honest plainness of dealing.

Her bad news was unfortunately true enough. For half a year Mr. Boddy had been breaking up; the process began very suddenly, and was all the harder to bear.

Under any circumstances he could not have held his own in the battle with society much longer—the battle for the day's food of which society does its best to rob each individual—and the catastrophe in the home of the girls who were dear to him as though they had been his own children, sounded the note of retreat. Thyrza was not so much to him as Lydia, but still was very much, and the sorrow which darkened Lydia's life was to him the beginning of the end of all things.

Yes, he hid the state of things very skilfully from Lydia's eyes. He told her that he was working, when he had no work to do ; he laughed at her questions as to whether he had comfortable meals, when he had had no meal at all. The Bowers never invited him to come to the parlour now and sit at their table ; they were so indifferent about him, so long as he paid his rent, that for a long time they did not know how hard bestead he was. Lydia had ventured to ask him if he would change his lodgings, provided she found him a room in a house where she could visit him without unpleasantness ; but the old man avoided her request. If he moved, all sorts of things would become known to Lydia which at present he was able to conceal.

One thing he could not hide. His hand had become so unsteady that the bow would no longer strike true notes from the violin ; so he ceased to play to the girl when she came. Lydia did not press him, thinking that probably it was too painful for him to revive memories of the old days. When hardships thickened, he would

have sold the instrument, in spite of every pang, but for the certainty that Lydia would miss it from his room.

He lived more and more to himself. Till the beginning of November he was able just to keep body and soul together after paying his rent, then the rent was no longer forthcoming. Not one article remained to him for which he could obtain money, not one save the violin. He durst not sell it. In spite of everything, he clung to a vague hope that someone would find work for him. To Ackroyd he could not go; that would be the same as telling Lydia, for he could trust no one in the state of mind which he had reached; even to strangers he was afraid to appeal with overmuch earnestness, lest stories should get about. Still an odd shilling came to him now and then. Poor old fellow, he did sad things. One morning he took the old blacking-brushes which he had used for years for his one boot, and a little pot of blacking, and an old box, and walked far away across the river, to a place where no one could know him, and there tried to earn a little by rivalling with the shoeblacks. It was useless; in three days he had earned but as many pence; he could not waste time thus. It was a terrible moment when he had first to tell Mrs. Bower that he could not discharge his due to her. He tried to put on a half-jesting air, to make out that his difficulty was of the most passing kind. Mrs. Bower ungraciously bade him not to trouble himself, to pay as soon as he could. But when the second day of default came, the landlady was even less gracious.



‘I ain’t an unreasonable woman, Mr. Boddy,’ she said, ‘and nobody could never say I was. But then I’ve a ’ome to keep up, as you knows. Isn’t it time as you thought things over a bit? I dessay there’s them as’ll see you don’t want, if only you’ll speak a word. I don’t want to be disagreeable to a old lodger, but then reason *is* reason, ain’t it?’

That Saturday night hunger drove him out. He stumped painfully into the busy region on the south side of London Bridge, and there, at midnight, he succeeded in begging a handful of fried potatoes from a fish-shop that was just closing. It was all he could do, after a dozen vain efforts to earn a copper.

But, when he got home in the early morning, a strange thing had happened. On his table lay half a loaf of bread, a piece of butter, and some tea twisted up in paper. How came these things here? He was in anguish lest Lydia had left them, lest Lydia had somehow discovered his condition and had come in his absence.

But it was not so. Lydia came, as usual, on Sunday afternoon, and clearly knew nothing of that gift. He had eaten, and was able once more to talk so cheerfully—in his great relief—that the girl went away happy in the thought that he had got over a turn of ill-health. They had talked, as always, of Thyrza. With Thyrza it was well, outwardly at all events; Lydia had just seen her, and could report that she seemed even happy. Mr. Boddy rejoiced at this. Might not *he* see



the little one some day ? Yes, surely he should ; Lydia would try for that.

Who had left him the food, then ? No one entered his room to do anything for him, save at intervals of a fortnight, when Mrs. Bower sent up a charwoman ; otherwise he had always waited upon himself. Two days went by, then the offering was renewed, just in the same way, and this time with the addition of some sugar. The giver could be but one person. Mary Bower knew of his need, and was doing what she could for him. He knew it in meeting her on the stairs the morning after ; she said a kind ‘ Good-day,’ and reddened, and went by with her head bent.

But it was bitter to receive such help, very alms. He could not refuse it, for otherwise he must have lain down in helplessness, and he trusted yet that there would come a turn in things. The winter cold began. Mrs. Bower had not denied coals ; he always burned so little that fuel was allowed to be covered by the rent. But now he scarcely ventured to keep his fire alight long enough to boil his kettle ; he still had a little supply for burning, and felt that he durst not go down to the cellar for more, when that was done.

Then came the day when his landlady told him with decisive brevity that she could trust him no longer. He must not be a foolish old man, but must ask help from those whose duty it was to give it him.

That was in the afternoon. Mrs. Bower had come up to his room and had asked for the rent. He waited

until it was dark, then stole out of the house, carrying his violin.

He would not sell it, only borrow a sum at the pawnbroker's, then he could some day recover the instrument. Nor must he go to a pawnshop in this neighbourhood, whence tales would spread. He stumped over into Southwark, and found a quiet street where the three brass balls hung above an illuminated shop front. The entrance to the pawning department was beneath a dark archway. At the door he stopped; there was a great lump in his throat, and suddenly, with great physical anguish, tears broke from his eyes. He stood away from the door until he could master the flow of tears; then he went in, carefully selected a box which was empty, and pledged the violin for ten shillings. The man refused to lend him more, and he could not argue.

That fit of weeping seemed to have affected him for ill; going forth again into the cold, he trembled violently, and by no effort could recover himself. He had to sit down upon a door-step. The chillness of his blood, which yet beat feverishly at his temples, affected him with a dread lest he should not have strength to reach home. His thoughts would not obey his will; again and again he fell into torment of apprehension, asking himself how to find money for the rent that was due, and only with a painful effort of mind remembering the ten shillings in his pocket. The door beneath which he was sitting suddenly opened; he staggered up and onwards.

But the cold and the weakness and the anguish of dread grew upon him. He could not remember the streets by which he had come. He stumped on, fancying that he recognised this and that object, and at length knew that he had reached Westminster Bridge Road. The joy of drawing near home supported him. He had only to go the length of Hercules Buildings, and then he would be close to the end of Paradise Street. He reached the grave-yard, walking for the most part as in a terrible dream, among strange distorted shapes of men and women, the houses tottering black on either hand, and ever that anvil-beat of the blood at his temples. Then of a sudden his wooden limb slipped, and he fell to the ground.

He was precisely in front of the Pooles' house. A woman just passing, who happened to know Mrs. Poole, ran up to the door and knocked, and, when Mrs. Poole came, asked for some water to throw over a poor old man who was in a fit on the pavement. Jane, going in for the water, spoke to her brother, who was sitting in the kitchen. Ackroyd went forth to see what could be done.

'Why, it's Boddy!' he exclaimed. 'We must carry him in. Jane, go and tell Jim to come here.'

Of course a crowd had already collected, dark as the street was.

'Hadn't we better take him over to the Bowers'?' asked Jim.

‘Yes, it’s old Mr. Boddy!’ cried a voice. ‘He lives at Mrs. Bower’s.’

‘I know that very well,’ said Ackroyd, ‘but it’s no good taking him there. Lend a hand, Jim; see, he’s coming round a bit.’ And he added, muttering, ‘I expect he’s starved to death, that’s about it.’

Only the night before, Totty had told him of the old man’s position, and he had been casting about for a way of giving help. He did not like to tell Lydia what was going on, yet the inquiries he had made of the men who occasionally employed Mr. Boddy convinced him that there was no hope of the latter’s continuing to support himself. In his present state, the old man must at least have friends about him, and not cold-blooded pinchers and parers, who had come to dislike him because of his relation to the Trent girls. With characteristic impulsiveness, Luke made up his mind that Mr. Boddy should be brought into the house and kept there; if need be he would provide for him out of his own pocket.

Mrs. Poole was no grumbler when a fellow-creature needed her kindness. In a moment a match was put to the fire in the parlour; thither Jim and Ackroyd bore the old man, and laid him upon the couch.

He did not seem wholly unconscious, for his eyes regarded first one, then the other, of those who were ministering to him, but he made no effort to speak; spoken to, he gave no sign of understanding. It was found that there was blood upon his head; he must

have injured himself in falling. For a quarter of an hour the attempts at restoring him were vain. Then Luke said :

‘I shall have to run round for the doctor. For all we know, he may be dying, for want of the proper things.’

‘Aye, go, lad,’ assented Jim. ‘I don’t like the look of his face. Do you, Jane?’

Husband and wife whispered together during Luke’s absence. They knew from the latter into what a miserable state the old man had sunk, and Jane was vigorous in reprobation of the Bowers. Ackroyd returned, saying that the doctor would be at hand in a minute or two.

‘Oughtn’t you to go and tell Miss Trent?’ Jane asked him, as all three stood helpless, waiting.

‘I’ve thought of it, but I’d rather not, if it can be helped. Wait till the doctor comes.’

The old man lay quite still, breathing heavily. His eyes were yet open, but had fixed themselves in one direction.

The doctor came. He directed that the sufferer should at once be put into a warm bed.

‘My room, then,’ said Luke. ‘Come and help, Jim.’

The directions were soon carried out, and the doctor went off, asking someone to follow for medicine.

The wound proved to be of no moment; graver causes must have led to the state of coma in which the

old man lay. When Luke returned from the doctor's, he reported that the latter had spoken rather seriously.

‘I must go and see Lydia,’ he said to his sister. ‘You don’t mind this bother, Jane, eh? You’ll sit by him?’

‘Of course I will. Go and fetch her; it’s my belief he hasn’t very long to live.’

It seemed to Ackroyd a long time since he had knocked at the door in Walnut Tree Walk; very much had come about since then. Impatient, he had to repeat his knock before anyone came. Then Mr. Jarmey appeared. No, he knew Miss Trent was not in; she had gone out with his wife half an hour ago, but it was getting late, and they were sure to be soon back.

‘Is Mr. Grail in?’

‘I think so. I’ll just knock and see.’

Gilbert was at home, and Ackroyd went into the parlour. The two were very friendly whenever they met, but that was seldom; Grail was surprised at the visit. He was sitting with his mother; they seemed to have been talking, for no book lay on the table. Luke explained why he had come to the house.

‘Will you let me sit here till she comes in, Grail?’

A chair was at once brought forward, with quiet readiness. One chair there was in the room which no one ever used, though at evening it was always put in a particular position, between the table and the fireplace. Gilbert kept his hand on the back of it as he talked.

Ackroyd railed against the Bowers. Gilbert did

not seem able to express very strong feeling, even when he had heard all that the other knew and suspected; his brows darkened, however, and he was anxious on Lydia's account.

An oppressive silence had fallen upon the three, when at length they heard the front-door open.

'Would you like mother to go upstairs to her and tell her?' Gilbert asked.

'I should. It would be kind of you, Mrs. Grail. But only just speak as if it was an accident; I wouldn't say anything else.'

Mrs. Grail left the room without speaking. She returned in a few minutes, and, leaving the door a little open, said in her very low, tremulous voice, that Lydia was waiting in the passage. Ackroyd shook hands with the two, and went out.

Lydia looked eagerly into his face.

'Is he very bad, Mr. Ackroyd?' she whispered.

'I hope he's come round by this time,' was his reply. 'My sister's attending to him, and we've got things for him from the doctor.'

They passed into the street, and walked quickly side by side.

'It was very good of you to take him in,' Lydia said. 'It would have been very hard to ask Mrs. Bower for help.'

'Yes, yes. We don't want them.'

Lydia and Mrs. Poole had never met. They looked with interest at each other. Ackroyd went down into



the kitchen, leaving them together in the room with the old man.

The night went on. Ackroyd and his brother-in-law smoked innumerable pipes by the kitchen fire. Jim often nodded, but Luke was far from sleep; the sad still half-hour spent with the Grails had troubled his imagination, and thoughts of Thyrza had been revived in him. Yes, he had loved Thyrza; all folly put aside, he knew that the memory of the sweet-voiced, golden-haired girl would for ever remain with him. And all this night he did not once think of Totty Nancarrow.

Fortunately, as it was Saturday, they had no need to think of work next morning. Jim would not go to bed; he kept up the most determined struggle with sleep, subduer of mortals. His wife came down now and then, and was angry with him for his useless obstinacy, so plain it was that he could scarcely hold up his great thick head. There was nothing good to report of the patient; he had not recovered consciousness.

At five o'clock, when, in spite of fire and lamp, the little kitchen looked haggard, Mrs. Poole entered hurriedly.

'Do you think the doctor 'ud come, Luke, if you went for him? He can't get breath. Lydia does want the doctor fetching.'

Luke was off in an instant.

Lydia stood by the bed, pale, anguished. Happily,



that struggle, which seemed of death, did not last very long. The worn old face, almost venerable at length in spite of the grotesqueness of its features, fell into calm. Then, almost as in a natural waking from sleep, the eyes opened and were aware of things.

‘Are you feeling better, grandad dear?’ Lydia asked.

He looked surprised, tried to speak; but there was no voice.

Luke was long.

The two women stood side by side. The old man kept endeavouring to utter words; his powerlessness was dreadful to him, his face showed. But at length he spoke.

‘Lyddy!—Thyrza!’

‘She shall come and see you, grandad. She shall come very soon.’

Again a vain endeavour to speak. His face altered; it expressed Lydia knew not what. A supreme effort, and he again spoke.

‘Mary Bower gave me all I wanted. Be friends with her, Lyddy!’

No more than that. Gradually, an end of struggle, an end of pain, an end of all things.

The doctor came. He said that no doubt there would have to be an inquest.

They left Lydia alone in the room. When it was midway through the winter morning, Mrs. Poole came

down and told Luke that the girl wished to speak to him ; he would find her in the parlour.

She had swollen eyes, but spoke with perfect calmness.

‘Mr. Ackroyd, what did he mean ? The last thing he said was, “Mary Bower gave me all I wanted.” I don’t know what he meant. Your sister says you’ll tell me.’

Luke could only guess at the sense of the words, but he told her all he knew.

‘I only heard it on Friday night, from Totty,’ he said. ‘I was thinking of every way I could to help him.’

‘Oh, but to think that you never told me !’ she exclaimed. ‘You’d no right to keep such a thing from me. It wasn’t kindness ; it wasn’t kindness at all. See what’s come of it !’

‘I do wish I had told you.’

Early in the afternoon Lydia went home. But before leaving, she searched in the poor old garments to see if, indeed, he had been penniless. The discovery of the money at first astonished her, but immediately after she found the pawn ticket. It was proof enough.

She was sitting in her room, at nightfall, when someone knocked. She went to the door. Mary Bower was there.

‘May I come in, Lydia ?’ Mary asked, with eyes downcast.

Lydia had started. She drew back, leaving the door open. Mary entered, closed the door behind her, and stood in agitation.

‘I know you hate me more than ever, Lydia,’ she began, tremulously; ‘but I did what I could for him. I want to tell you that I did what I could for him, and I’d never have let mother give him notice. I told her last night that, if she did, I’d leave home. I put food in his room, and nobody knew about it. Perhaps you don’t believe me; if he could speak, he’d tell you someone did, and it was me.’

Lydia covered her face and wept. Mary, drawing nearer, went on with broken voice:

‘I’ve been very much to blame, Lydia. I’ve been hard and unforgiving. But that night when you told me you hated me, I wanted to say how sorry I was for you. I never spoke a word against Thyrza, not a word. And now I couldn’t help coming to you. I want to be friends again, Lyddy dear. Don’t send me away! I’ve been to blame in everything; I’ve been bad-hearted. You might well not believe my religion when you saw me acting as I did.’

She ceased, drawn to Lydia’s heart and kissed with more than the old affection.

‘I know what you did for him, Mary. He told me—the last words he spoke. He asked me to be friends with you again. I do want a friend, Mary; I’m very lonely. I’ll love you as long as I live for being kind to him.’

They lit no light, but sat together by the glow of the fire, speaking in very low voices, often with long intervals of silence. Two poor girls, the one as ignorant as the other, but speaking with awed spirit of death and the hope that is thereafter.

## CHAPTER IV.

## TOTTY'S LUCK.

‘THE Little Shop with the Large Heart’ had suffered a grave loss: Miss Totty Nancarrow had withdrawn her custom from it.

Totty had patronised Mrs. Bower very steadily for some five years. It was true that the large-hearted shop put a rather large price on certain things, in comparison with what they *could* be bought for in Lambeth. If you wanted a pot of marmalade, for instance, Mrs. Bower sold it for sixpence, whereas it was notoriously purchasable for fivepence-halfpenny at grocers in Lambeth Walk. If you went for a quarter of a pound of butter, you had no choice of quality, and paid fourpence three farthings, whilst in Lambeth Walk you obtained a better article for the even fourpence. Totty, however, had a principle that one ought to deal rather with acquaintances than with strangers, and another principle that it was better to pay a halfpenny more for an article to be had by crossing the street than a halfpenny less and go a whole street’s length for it. True girl of the people was Totty, herein as in other respects.

It was a sheer fact that Mrs. Bower's business depended on the arrant indolence and indifference to small economies of those women who lived in her immediate neighbourhood. It is the same kind of thing that leads working people to pay for having meat badly cooked at the baker's instead of cooking it cheaply and well themselves; that leads them to buy expensive, ready-prepared suppers at the pork butcher's and the fried-fish shop, instead of tossing up an equally good and very inexpensive supper for themselves.

But I am talking of Totty, and it is my last thought to rail at her. Considering her income, she had spent a great deal with Mrs. Bower, as you remember that lady once remarking. Totty had a mind to live on luxuries; if she had not money enough for both bread and marmalade, she chose to have the marmalade alone; if she could not buy meat and pickles at the same time, she would have pickles and go without meat. Marmalade and pickles she deemed the indispensables of life; if you could not get those—well, it was no uncommon thing for poor creatures to be driven to the workhouse. And the strange thing was that she looked so well on such diet. Since the age of fifteen, when, in truth, she had been a little peaked and terribly tenuous at the waist, her personal appearance had steadily improved. Her spirits had, by degrees, reached their present point of perpetual effervescence. But Totty could be grave, and, if occasion were, sad.

She had been both grave and sad many a time since

Thyrza had gone away. She reproached herself in secret for her 'nastiness' to the little one at their last meeting, nastiness for which, as it proved, there was no justification whatever. Now she was sad for poor old Mr. Boddy's death. She knew that it was another hard blow to Lydia, and, as you are aware, in her heart she respected Lydia profoundly. Her sorrow led to that one practical result—no more marmalade and pickles from Mrs. Bower. The Bowers had behaved vilely, from every point of view that was demonstrable. Under the circumstances, they ought to have done without their rent, if need were, till Doomsday when, as Totty understood, all such arrears are made good to one with the utmost accuracy—nay, with positive interest to boot. She had not seen any reason for quarrelling with the Bowers on the score of the scandal they spread about Thyrza, since there really seemed ground for their stories; and it was right that 'goings on' of that kind should be put a stop to. Totty would always—that is, as often as she could—be scrupulously just. But this last affair was beyond endurance. Not another penny went from her pocket to 'The Little Shop with the Large Heart.'

Her income this past year had fallen short of what she usually counted upon; not to a great extent, but the sum deducted had been wont to come to her as a pure grace, and she felt the loss of it. Her uncle had omitted to send his usual present on her birthday. Nor had he visited her to renew the proposal that she should

surrender her liberty in return for being housed and dressed respectably. What did this mean? Had he—it was probable enough—grown tired of her, and said to himself that, as she wished to go her own way, go her own way she should? He was a crusty old fellow. Totty had often wondered that he ‘stood her cheek’ so good humouredly. Yet somehow she did not think it likely that he would break off intercourse with her in this abrupt way; no, it was not like him. He would have, at all events, seen her for a last time, and have given her a well-understood last chance. Was he dead? Possible enough; his age must be nearer seventy than sixty. If dead, well, there was an end of it. No more birthday presents; no more offers to ‘be made a lady of.’

It did not greatly matter, of course. Totty could not be expected to nurture an affection for her crusty uncle with his shop in Tottenham Court Road; in fact, he had behaved badly to her branch of the family, and such behaviour cannot always be made up for. As to the offer, she had declined it in perfect good faith. Yes, she preferred her liberty, her innocent nights at the Canterbury Music Hall, her scampering about the streets at all hours, her marmalade and pickles eaten off a table covered with a newspaper in company with half a dozen friends as harum-scarum as herself. Deliberately, she preferred these joys to anything she could imagine as entering into the life of a ‘lady.’

However, it was a fact that Christmas was very near, also a fact that she stood pledged to marry Luke



Ackroyd any day after Christmas that he chose to claim her. She was a little sorry that she could not inform her uncle in Tottenham Court Road of the change she was about to make in her life; there was no knowing how he might have behaved on such an occasion. Luke had been saving a little money of late, but it was naturally a very little; he, foolish fellow, had a way of buying her things which she did not in the least want, but which she could not refuse since it gave him such enormous pleasure to offer them. Luke was very generous, whatever his faults might be. Certain presents of his she had returned to him, in wrath, probably once a fortnight, and when, in the course of things, she had to take them back again, some object was always added. The presents cost little, it is true; Totty did not ask the price of them, but liked the kindness which suggested their purchase. She liked many things about Luke Ackroyd; whether she really liked him himself, liked him in 'the proper way'—well, that was a question she asked herself often enough without any very definite answer.

No matter, she had promised to marry him, and she was not the girl to break her word. Now, if her uncle had still been in communication with her, was it not a very likely thing that he would have felt a desire to—in fact, to do something for them? It was not nice to begin married life in furnished lodgings, especially if prudence dictated the living in a single room, as such numbers of her acquaintances did. Totty had dis-

covered that couples who wedded and went to live in one furnished room seldom got along well together. It was well if the wife did not shortly go about with ugly-looking bruises on her face, or with her arm in a sling. No, to be sure, Luke Ackroyd was not a man of that kind; it was inconceivable that he should ever be harsh to her, let alone brutal. Still, it was *not* nice to begin in furnished lodgings. And perhaps her uncle in Tottenham Court Road—he was, in fact, a furniture dealer,—would have seen his way to garnish for them a modest couple of rooms, by way of wedding-present. But, he having drawn back from communication, Totty could not bring herself to his notice again, not she.

She was thinking over all these things a week before Christmas. It was Sunday afternoon, and, for a wonder, she was sitting alone in her room. Mr. Bunce was at home, or she would have had little Nelly to keep her company. Still, she said to herself that she was not sorry to have a minute or two to put certain things straight in her mind. What a mind it was, Totty Nancarrow's!

The landlady looked in at the door.

‘Here’s a gemman wants to see you, Miss Nancarrow.’

‘Oh? What sort of a gentleman?’

‘Why, oldish—five-an’-forty, I dessay. Greyish beard and a big nose. Speaks very loud and important like.’

Not her uncle; he had no beard and a very small

nose, and could not thus have altered since she last saw him.

‘All right. I’ll go and ask him what he wants.’

Totty gave a glance at her six square inches of looking-glass, made a movement with her hand which was like a box on each ear, then went downstairs in her usual way, swinging by the banisters down three steps at a time. At the door she found an individual answering very fairly to the landlady’s graphic description. The experienced eye would have perceived that he was not, in the restricted sense of the word, a gentleman; still, he wore good clothing, and had of a truth an important air.

‘You want me, sir?’ Totty asked, coming to a sudden stand in front of him, and examining him with steady eye.

He returned the gaze with equal steadiness. Both hands rested on the top of his umbrella, and his attitude was very much that of a man who views a horse he has thoughts of purchasing.

‘You are Miss Nancarrow, I think?’ he said, clearing his throat. ‘Christian name, Totty.’

‘That’s me, I believe.’

‘Jusso! I should like to have a word with you, Miss Nancarrow, if you will allow me.’

‘You can’t say it here, sir?’

‘Why, no, I can’t. If you could——’

Totty did not wait for him to finish, but ran away to get permission to use the landlady’s parlour. To

this she introduced her visitor, who seated himself without invitation, and, after gazing about the room, said :

‘Pray sit down, Miss Nancarrow. I’ve come to see you on a matter of some importance. I am Mr. Barlow, an old friend of your uncle’s. You have possibly heard of me?’

‘No, I haven’t,’ Totty replied.

As she spoke, it struck her that there was a broad black band round Mr. Barlow’s shiny hat.

‘Ah, you haven’t; jusso!’

Mr. Barlow again cleared his throat, looking about the floor as if he were in the habit of living near a spittoon. And then he paused a little, elevating and sinking his bushy eyebrows. Totty, who had taken the edge of a chair, moved her feet impatiently.

‘Well, Miss Totty Nancarrow,’ resumed her visitor, using his umbrella to prop his chin, and rolling out his words with evident enjoyment of his task, ‘I have the unpleasant duty of informing you that your late uncle is dead.’

The phrase might have excited a smile. Totty kept an even countenance and said she was sorry to hear it.

‘Jusso! He has been dead three months, and he was ill nearly six. I am appointed one of the executors by his will—me and a friend of mine, Mr. Higgins. I dare say you haven’t heard of him. We’ve been putting your late uncle’s affairs in order.’

‘Have you?’ said Totty, because she had nothing else to say.

‘We have. I have come to see you, Miss Nancarrow, because you are interested in the will.’

‘Oh, am I?’

It was said with a kind of disinterested curiosity. Mr. Barlow, having regarded her fixedly for a moment, bent his head till his forehead rested upon the umbrella, and seemed to brood.

‘Don’t you feel well, sir?’ Totty asked, with a *naïveté* which betrayed her impatience.

‘Quite well, quite well.’

‘You was saying something about my uncle’s will.’

‘Jusso! Your name is in the will, Miss Nancarrow. Your uncle has bequeathed to you the sum of two hundred and fifty pounds.’

‘Have you brought it with you, sir?’

‘The will?’

‘No, the money.’

‘My dear Miss Nancarrow, things are not done in that way,’ remarked Mr. Barlow, smiling at her ingenuousness.

‘How then, sir?’

‘There are conditions attached to this bequest. It is my duty to explain them to you. I shall avoid the terms of the law, out of consideration to you, Miss Nancarrow, and try to express myself very simply. I hope you’ll be able to follow me.’

Totty regarded him with wide eyes and smiled.

‘I’ll do my best, sir.’

‘Now please listen.’ He rested one elbow on his

umbrella, and with the other hand made demonstrations in the air as he proceeded. Throughout he spoke as one who addresses a person partly imbecile.

‘This sum of two hundred and fifty pounds, Miss Nancarrow, is not—you follow me?—is not to be given to you at once—you grasp that?—I am trustee for the money; that means—attend, please—it lies in my hands until the time and the occasion comes for—mind—for giving it to you. You understand so far?’

‘I shouldn’t mind a harder word now and then, sir, if it makes it easier for you.’

Mr. Barlow examined her, but Totty’s face was very placid. She cast down her eyes, and watched her toes tapping together.

‘Well, well; I think you follow me. Now the conditions are these. The money is payable to you—payable, you see—on your marriage.’

‘Oh!’

‘I beg you not to interrupt me. Is payable to you on your marriage, and then—now pray attend—*not* unless you obtain the approval of myself and of Mr. Higgins—unless you obtain *our* approval of the man you propose to marry.’

‘Oh!’

‘You have understood, I hope?’

‘I shall marry who I like, sir,’ observed Totty, quietly.

Mr. Barlow looked at her with surprise.

‘My dear Miss Nancarrow, nobody ever said you

shouldn't. It isn't a question of your marrying, but of two hundred and fifty pounds.'

'I don't see what it's got to do with anybody who I choose to marry.'

'Jusso, jusso! nothing could be truer. It's only a question of two hundred and fifty pounds.'

Totty was about to make another indignant remark, but she checked herself. Her toes were tapping together very rapidly; she watched them for half a minute, then asked:

'And suppose I don't choose to marry anybody at all?'

'I see you are capable of following these things,' said Mr. Barlow, smiling. 'If you reach the age of five-and-twenty without marrying, the money goes to another purpose, of which it is not necessary to speak.'

'Oh! I don't see why my uncle bothered himself so much about me marrying.'

'No doubt your late uncle had some good reason for these provisions, Miss Nancarrow,' said the other, gravely. 'We should speak respectfully of those who are no more. It seems to me your late uncle took very kind thought for you.'

Totty considered that, but neither assented nor differed.

'Will you tell me,' she asked after a silence, speaking with a good deal of hauteur, 'what sort of a man you'd approve of?'



‘With pleasure, Miss Nancarrow ; with very great pleasure. Mr. Higgins and me have thought over the subject, have given it our best attention. We think that by laying down three conditions we shall meet the case.’

He stared at the ceiling, till Totty asked :

‘Well, and what are they, sir?’

‘Pray do not interrupt me ; I was about to tell you. First, then, this man’s age must be at least three-and-twenty. You understand?’

‘I think I do.’

‘Secondly, he must have a recognised profession, business, trade or handicraft, and must satisfy me and Mr. Higgins that he is able to support a wife.’

‘And then?’

‘And then, as you say, Miss Nancarrow, he must be able to prove to me and Mr. Higgins that he has lived in one and the same house for a year previous to his marriage with you.’

Mr. Barlow delivered this with slow emphasis, as if such a test of respectability were the finest fruit of administrative wisdom.

Totty laughed. She had expected something quite different.

‘You smile, Miss Nancarrow?’ remarked Mr. Barlow, with a slightly offended air.

‘No, I was laughing.’

‘And at what, pray?’

‘Nothing.’



‘H’m. Well, I hope I have made everything clear to you.’

‘All the same, sir, I shall marry whoever I like.’

‘I’ve no doubt whatever you will. I shall leave you my address, Miss Nancarrow, so that you can communicate with me at any moment.’

‘Thank you, sir.’ She took the offered card and thrust it into her pocket. ‘And if I don’t want to marry at all, I shan’t.’

‘It is at your option, Miss Nancarrow. Now I’ll say good-morning to you. Perhaps you’ll allow me to shake hands with you and congratulate you upon this—this little fortune.’

‘Oh, yes.’

Totty gave Mr. Barlow’s fat hand a jerk. He drew himself up, cleared his throat, and stalked to the door, regarding with lofty patronage the signs of poverty about him. At the door he took off his hat, bowed, departed.

Totty returned to her room. She resumed her former seat, and began to hum a slow air. Then she tilted her chair back against the wall, and turned her face upwards musing.

It was not easy for her to realise the meaning of two hundred and fifty pounds. Reckon it up, for instance, in marmalade and pickles; it became confusing very soon. Reckon it up in tables and chairs; ah, that was more to the point. But even then, what a stupendous margin! For twenty pounds you could

furnish a couple of rooms in a way to make all your neighbours envious. It was like attempting to comprehend infinity by making clear to one's mind the distance to the moon.

The three conditions; Luke Ackroyd could satisfy them all. How often he had said that what he wanted was a little capital to establish a comfortable home of his own, when he would feel settled for life. No thought now of furnished lodgings. Fancy making one's husband a present of two hundred and fifty pounds! Much better that than receiving presents oneself.

She was to meet Luke to-night, and it was time that a definite arrangement was made as to their marriage. Somehow, Totty did not feel quite so joyous as she ought to have done; she could not fix her mind on the two hundred and fifty pounds, but it wandered off to other things which had nothing to do with money. 'Come now,' she said to herself at length, 'do I care for anybody more than for him? No; it's quite certain I don't. Do I care much for him himself? Do I care for him properly?' Suddenly she thought of Thyrza; she remembered Thyrza's question: 'Do you love him, Totty?'

No, she did not love him. She had known it for a good many weeks. And, what was more, she had known perfectly well that he did not love her.

There it was, no doubt. 'If he loved me, I should love him. I could; I think I could. Not like Thyrza

loved Mr. Egremont, to go mad about him ; that isn't my style ; I wouldn't be so foolish about *any* man, not I ! But I could be very fond of him. And—there's no hiding it—I'm not—I shouldn't grieve a bit if we said good-bye to-night and never saw each other again.'

How did she know he didn't love her ? 'As if I couldn't tell ! Just listen when he speaks about Thyrza ; he'd never speak about me like that, if I ran away from him. And how he speaks about Lydia ; why, even about Lydia he thinks a good deal more than he does about me. He often talks to me as if I was a man ; he wouldn't if he—if he loved me.'

Totty found it difficult to say that word even to herself. 'The fact of the matter is, I don't think as I shall ever care properly for anybody. I've a good mind not to marry at all, as I always said I wouldn't. I was right enough as long as I kept to that. The girls 'll only make fun of me.'

Yes, but her promise ?—She began to feel gloomy. Perhaps nightfall had something to do with it. Should she make tea ? No, she didn't care for it. She would go out—somewhere.

She walked from Newport Street to Lambeth Road, passed Bethlehem Hospital (Bedlam), and came to St. George's Cathedral. It is a long, vast, ugly building, unfinished, for it still lacks towers ; in the dark it looked very cold and forbidding, but Totty had a sense that there was warmth within, warmth and shelter of a kind that she needed just now.

She entered, and, at the proper place, dropped to her knees and crossed herself. Then she stood looking about. Near her, hanging against a pillar, was a box with the superscription: 'For the Souls in Purgatory.' She always put a penny into this box, and did so now.

Then she walked softly to an image of the Virgin, at whose feet someone had laid hothouse flowers. A poor woman was kneeling there, a woman in rags; her head was bent in prayer, her hands clasped against her breast. Totty knelt beside her, bent her own head and clasped her hands.

Yes, it was good to be here. All was very still; but few lights were burning. When Totty needed a mother's counsel, a mother's love, she was wont to come here and whisper humble thoughts to the image which looked down so soothingly upon all who made appeal. To Totty her religion was a purely private interest. It would never, for instance, have occurred to her to demand that her husband should be a Catholic, not even that he should view her faith with sympathetic tolerance. No word on this subject would ever pass her lips. What was it to anyone else if she had in secret a mother to whom she breathed her troubles and her difficulties? Could anyone grudge her that? The consolation was too sacred to speak of. Her thoughts did not rise to a Deity; she thought but seldom of the story which told her that Deity had taken man's form. The Madonna was enough, the mother whose gentle

heart was full of sorrows and who had power to aid the sorrowful.

The poor ragged woman sighed deeply, rose and went forth with humble step—went forth to who knows what miseries, what cruelties and despairs. But in her sigh there had been consolation.

Even so with Totty. When at length she left the church, her way was by no means clear of all obstacles, but the trouble which had come upon her with unwonted force was much simplified. It was plain to her that she *could* give herself to Ackroyd, and that to give him the two hundred and fifty pounds would be a very substantial pleasure. Growing accustomed to the thought of her wealth, she derived from it a quiet pride, which made her walk homewards more staidly than usual. Luke could never forget that she had been a great help to him.

She would let him settle everything to-night, then would tell him.

These winter nights were troublesome to an unfortunate pair who wished to talk in a leisurely way together, yet had no shelter save that of a place of public entertainment, or an archway under the line. And to-night it was particularly cold; there had even fallen a little snow. Totty and Ackroyd met, as usual, at the end of Paradise Street. It being Sunday, they could not go to the music-hall, and it was really impossible to stand about in the open air.

‘Look here, Totty,’ said Ackroyd, ‘you *must* come

into the house. You needn't see anyone, unless you like. We can have the sitting-room to ourselves. The others always sit downstairs.'

Totty hesitated, but at length assented. If the truth were known, her two hundred and fifty pounds had probably something to do with her yielding on this point. At present she could face Mrs. Poole on equal terms.

So they entered the house, and Luke, having left his companion in the parlour, went down to apprise his sister. Jane came up, and gave the girl a civil greeting. It was not cordial, nor did Totty affect warmth of feeling. Mrs. Poole speedily left the two to themselves.

Totty sat in her chair rather stiffly. She was not accustomed to take her ease in rooms even as well appointed as this. Luke tried to be merry, to show that he was delighted, to be affectionate; he did not succeed very well. Presently they were sitting at a little distance from each other, each waiting for the other to speak.

'When is it to be?' Ackroyd said at length, bending forward.

'I don't know. Is it *really* to be?'

'Why not? Of course it is.'

Totty had felt colder to him than ever before, since she had entered this room. The strangeness of the surroundings affected her disagreeably. She wished they had walked about in the snowy streets.

‘Of course you know we shall always be quarrelling,’ she said, with a laugh.

‘No, we shan’t. It’ll be different then. At all events, it’ll be your fault if we do.’

Silence came again.

‘What day?’ Luke asked.

‘When you like. If you really mean it.’

‘Now what’s the use of talking in that way! Why *shouldn’t* I mean it?’

‘If I ask you a question will you answer me honest?’

She was leaning forward, with a touch of colour on her cheeks, and a sudden curious light in her eyes; she seemed ashamed at something, and both eager and reluctant.

‘What is it? Yes, I’ll answer you the truth.’

‘The very truth? No, I shan’t ask you. What day do you want it to be?’

‘Nonsense! What was the question? I won’t listen to anything till you’ve told me.’

‘It was a silly question. I don’t really want to ask you. I forget what it was.’

Totty was strangely unlike herself, hesitating, diffident, ashamed. He insisted; she refused to speak. He got vexed, turned mute.

‘Well then, I *will* ask you,’ Totty exclaimed of a sudden. ‘And mind, I shall know if you’re honest or not. Suppose both Thyrza Trent and me was in this room, and you had your choice between us, which would it be?’

Ackroyd flushed, then looked seriously offended.



‘Won’t you answer?’

‘I don’t like to joke about such things.’

‘And I don’t either, that’s the truth; that’s why such a thing came into my head. You needn’t answer; I’d rather you didn’t. Of course I know what you’d have to say.’

‘You are talking nonsense. There couldn’t be a choice, because I’ve *made* my choice. Will you marry me or not?’

‘Yes, I will. Any day you like.’

‘Yes, and afterwards keep asking me questions like this.’

‘It wasn’t right, I know. But you’re wrong when you say I should ever speak of it again.’

‘I don’t know what to think, Totty. It looks very much as if *you* didn’t want to have *me*. Now look, here’s a question for *you*. Suppose I’d never asked you before to-night, and now I came and asked you to marry me, what would you say? Now, honest.’

‘You’ve not answered me.’

‘I have.’

He spoke it significantly, and she understood him.

‘Now, what *would* you say, Totty?’

‘I should say, that I couldn’t say neither yes nor no for certain, and I wanted to wait.’

‘You’re an honest girl. Shake hands, and let us wait another six months.’

Totty reddened, and inwardly reproached herself with complete meanness. But she was glad—and Luke Ackroyd was glad.



## CHAPTER V.

## A MINOR PROPHECY.

THYRZA was not to be a boarder with the Emersons, nor did Mrs. Ormonde request them to make a friend of her. Nothing more was proposed than that she should rent from them their spare room, which was tolerably spacious and could be used both as bed-chamber and parlour. Her meals were to be supplied to her by the landlady of the house. The only stipulation with the Emersons was that she should receive her singing-lessons in their sitting-room, where there was a piano.

Thyrza herself specially desired of Mrs. Ormonde that she might live as much alone as possible. She declared that it would be no hardship whatever to her to be without companionship. Her day's occupation would be chiefly sewing, for Mrs. Ormonde had made arrangements that she should have regular employment for her needle from a certain charitable 'Home,' at Hampstead. For this work she received payment, which—Mrs. Ormonde made it appear—would suffice to discharge her obligations to the Emersons and her landlady. Moreover, two days of the week she was to spend

at the said Home, where certain, not too exacting, duties were assigned to her.

All this was very neatly contrived, and Mrs. Ormonde felt rather proud of her success in so far meeting the requirements of a very difficult case. A competent judge had reported so favourably of Thyrza's voice, that there was a strong probability of its some day enabling her to earn a living—should that be necessary—in one of the many paths which our musical time opens to those thus happily endowed; no stress was laid on that, however, for it was far from desirable that Thyrza should be nursed into expectation of a golden future. Mrs. Ormonde had determined that, if her exertion would accomplish it, Thyrza should yet have as large a share of happiness as a sober hope may claim for a girl of passionate instincts, of rare beauty, and, it might be, of latent genius. To be sure, such claim cannot be extravagant. The happy people of the world are the dull, unimaginative beings from whom the gods, in their kindness, have veiled all vision of the rising and the setting day, of sea-limits, and of the stars of the night, whose ears are thickened against the hungry cry of music, where thought finds nowhere mystery. Truly, Thyrza Trent was not of those. What joys were to be hers she must pluck out of the fire, and there are but few of her kind whom in the end the fire does not consume.

But for the present things seemed to be set going on a smooth track. And to be sure, though she had thought

it better to ask no such kindness, Mrs. Ormonde knew that her friend Clara Emerson would very shortly make a companion of Thyrsa. It was Clara's nature to make a friend of any 'nice' person who gave a sign of readiness for friendly intercourse. She had no pride; the fact of Thyrsa's being untaught, and a needle-plier, would make no difference to her when she had discovered the girl's sweetness of disposition.

The acquaintance between Mrs. Ormonde and Clara had come about in this way. An elder sister of the latter's had held the position of matron at The Chestnuts before Mrs. Mapper's day. She died of a fever caught from a child, and then for the first time Mrs. Ormonde became aware that the dead woman had largely contributed to the support of a sister, who was making struggling commencements as a teacher of music in London. Helpful as always, Mrs. Ormonde exerted herself to widen Clara's circle of acquaintances, with the result that very shortly the girl had as many pupils as she needed. Not long after, Clara announced her coming marriage. Her future husband was a certain Harold Emerson, a young man who held a position in a city warehouse. Clara had given lessons to his young sisters. She did not say then, but revealed it afterwards, that this engagement of theirs had given much offence to Harold's parents, who, in fact, continued to hold aloof after the marriage. An elder sister of his who was of rather restless temperament—in other words, poor girl, did not see why she should pretend to

be happy when, at nine-and-twenty, there seemed no chance of her ever changing her condition—this elder sister, Mabel by name, took her brother's side in the contest, and went off to occupy a room in the lodgings of the newly-married pair. Mabel had been in the habit of earning a little pocket-money in certain mysterious genteel ways, discoverable by ladies who wish to earn, yet have not reached the point of throwing down the gauntlet to the world, and becoming governesses, or entering the post-office; fancy-work of various kinds had proved her resource, I believe. And henceforth, by dint of a little vigour, she became self-supporting. Her tenancy of the room rented from her brother lasted about a year. One day she gave formal notice, and went off to live entirely alone. Mrs. Emerson deplored this rupture, and was quite unable to understand what had led to it. Her husband could not help her to an explanation; he thought it more than likely that Mabel would before long think better of her decision, and therefore, as I mentioned before, the extra room was still kept on. It had been vacant for three months when Mrs. Ormonde came with her request, and the circumstances of the married couple were not such as to justify their refusing a tenant.

What Mrs. Ormonde had foreseen was not long in coming to pass. Thyrsa was very shy at first, and met every advance with so much reserve, that Clara could not allow herself to seem importunate. But a month or six weeks saw a gradual drawing nearer of the two.

Thyrza had discovered what a simple, good-natured woman Mrs. Emerson was, and she could not long resist any offer of kindness. They began by talking for a few minutes as they met on the stairs; then by chance they happened to be going forth at the same time, and walked a little way together. From this it was an easy step for Clara to peep into Thyrza's room and offer a few flowers, part of a present from one of her pupils. By the beginning of autumn they were on easy terms. Not terms of intimacy by any means, for, though Clara talked with much freedom, Thyrza, whose position was a difficult one, preserved reticence on her own affairs. It reassured her when she found that she had no impertinent curiosity to fear from Mrs. Emerson. On the ground thus circumscribed she was very glad to spend an hour with Clara now and then.

Then Clara's music began to prove an irresistible attraction. When she heard the piano, Thyrza would open her door gently, that she might not lose anything of the delight. And at length—not till mid-autumn—she timidly accepted Clara's invitation to come and pass an evening in the parlour. Mr. Emerson was not at home that night. On the next occasion, however, he was at home. And after that there was frequent communication of a very friendly kind.

One winter's evening Thyrza had just had her solitary tea, and was sitting down to add a page to a letter to Lydia, a letter which grew always from day to

day, until considerations of postage obliged her to send it off and begin a new one, when Mrs. Emerson came to her room.

‘I’m going out,’ Clara said. ‘I have to go to Finsbury Park to play all night to a children’s dancing party. Isn’t that delightful? *Don’t* you wish you were coming?’

‘It must be very tiresome,’ Thyrsa said, sympathetically.

‘Oh no, I don’t mind it a bit. It’s rather fun, when I once get settled to the work, you know. Just at first you know—but then that’s only because it’s such a long way there, and I can’t help thinking of the long way back. But I’ve come to ask a favour.’

‘Have you?’ Thyrsa said, unable to suppress all sign of anxiety.

‘Are you *very* busy?’

‘Not, not very. I’m only writing a letter.’

‘*Would* you go and sit in the parlour a little? My husband doesn’t feel at all well to-night, and it’s quite miserable to leave him alone for so long; I’ve really thought once or twice that I wouldn’t go, but then I must keep an engagement, mustn’t I? He feels so dreadfully dull. I can’t tell you what a kindness it would be if you’d go and sit there for an hour. Will you, Miss Trent?’

Thyrsa more than hesitated. She shrank back involuntarily upon her chair.

‘I’m afraid I can’t, Mrs. Emerson,’ she began con-

fusedly. 'I really—you know I find it hard to talk much. I don't think I——'

'Oh, you needn't talk much, indeed. Get him to read something to you; he's very fond of reading aloud. Anything to prevent him from getting so gloomy. I've tried to persuade him to go out, but he won't; you see, he's so afraid of colds, they try him dreadfully. But of course if you——'

'Are—are you sure I could——? Might I take my sewing——'

'The very thing! It's only just a little quiet companionship he needs, and you're naturally so cheerful, you know, Miss Trent; it makes anyone feel better to see you working.'

'Really? You think me cheerful?'

'Why, of course I do! Don't I hear you singing when you sit here by yourself? At all events, you always look very cheerful when you're with us.'

'Oh, yes; I often feel so.'

She smiled thoughtfully.

'Would you go, then? I should be so grateful.'

'I have several things to do. I'm afraid I couldn't stay very long.'

'Only an hour—or less if you can't spare that.'

Thyrza tried to assent pleasantly. She at once made a little bundle of sewing and followed Mrs. Emerson down the flight of stairs that led to the parlour.

The dress that she wore nowadays was somewhat



better than those which Lydia and she had been wont to make together, but it was quite inexpensive, and as simple as could be. In one respect her appearance had changed noticeably; the golden hair no longer fell in the heavy braid to her waist, but was coiled upon the back of her head. Mrs. Ormonde had suggested this novelty. It made her look a little older, or, to express it better, took away something of that childish *naïveté* which had been such a touching element in her beauty. Her head looked heavier now; she seemed to wear a crown of loveliness which was not without its penalties. Her lips were closed with just that degree of firmness which tells of conscious purpose in a woman's life, of self-reverence and harmonious thought. Her eyelids oftenest drooped; in walking she seldom gazed about her. There was still youth in all her movements, and one would have said, but for the constant pallor of her cheeks, the health which ministers to grace. It was true that her look did not at once suggest hidden sadness, and true even that at times she appeared joyful. But the significance of Thyrza's face could only be read by eyes of large sympathy and intelligence.

Harold Emerson was in a low chair by the fire. At Thyrza's entrance, he rose slowly and with a deep breath, as if flesh and spirit were alike burdensome to him. Clara was in the room.

‘So my wife was determined to give you trouble, Miss Trent,’ he said. ‘The fact is, I really shall be



grateful to anyone who will come and help me to fight with demons.'

'Don't be frightened, Miss Trent,' said Clara, laughing, as she tied the strings of her bonnet. 'That's only his way of saying that he is in low spirits. Where's my music? Harold, where *is* that roll of dance-music gone? I shall be late; I know I shall be late. Oh, here it is. Now, good-bye.'

She kissed her husband affectionately, and he followed her, as she left the room, with a look in which there seemed to be real tenderness. Then, Thyrza having seated herself with her sewing, he threw himself into the low chair again.

He was six-and-twenty, effeminately made, with hair almost as golden as Thyrza's own. Handsome he was not, though he had a strong tendency to think himself so, and was encouraged in it by his wife's sincere and incessant flattery. His face was too much like that of an overgrown boy, imperfectly developed, soft of outline, rather doughy; he had a long upper lip, a diminutive chin, delicate ears. His limbs were long and ungraceful, and he had a constant difficulty in disposing of them. In an old grey house-coat, trousers too short for him, and ragged toasted slippers, he looked slovenly. He imagined he looked picturesque.

'What a thing it is, Miss Trent,' he began in a voice which was high pitched and had uncertain breaks, a shockingly immature voice, 'what a thing it is for a man of my age to be practically a chronic invalid! I'm

naturally a very active man, too; I like to be up and about; and here I have to sit day after day. No wonder the demons get at me.'

'It's a great pity,' Thyrza said, in a low voice. She had begun to sew diligently.

'Now I wonder whether you understand what I mean by the demons? I don't suppose you do. It isn't likely you should. You have a natural joy in life, and I have as good as none. You don't know what it is to look round and see skeletons instead of living people. Do you, now?'

'No, I don't, Mr. Emerson.'

'Ah, how I envy you! You are healthy and natural. I am profoundly morbid—morbid.'

Thyrza did not know what that word meant. She supposed it described some disease. Harold thrust his hands into his coat pockets, and frowned at the fire. Then he tried to hit a piece of coal with his toe, and failed, almost falling off his chair.

'What a good wife I have!' he exclaimed. 'Don't you think so, Miss Trent? Haven't you noticed it?'

'Yes—I think so.'

'You must have done. Now just look at her going to Finsbury Park a night like this. It's freezing; I can feel even here that it's freezing. Heaven knows when she'll get back, and how she'll get back. And to play dance tunes for a swarm of children! I don't know what other wife would do it, I'm sure I don't.'

He spoke this as if it were a profound reflection, his

voice sinking on the words ; and he repeated, yet lower, 'I'm *sure* I don't.'

Thyrza could make no remark on the subject. Harold continued :

'Now I sit here, and I seem to be doing nothing. If I *was* doing nothing, it would be horrible, simply horrible. Now, wouldn't it?'

'What are you doing, Mr. Emerson?' Thyrza was obliged to ask, with as little curiosity as was consistent with politeness.

'Well now, I'll tell you. It isn't a thing I talk about. I've told nobody but Clara. But I will tell you, Miss Trent. But first, what do you think of our present state of Society?'

Thyrza was at a loss.

'You understand me? I mean, do you think the world is arranged well? Do you think things are all that they should be?'

'N—no, I don't think so, Mr. Emerson.'

'You understand what I mean when I say that Society is on a corrupt basis? Think of women having to work for a living, and often not able to keep themselves alive, work as hard as they will. Think of the multitudes of men who are made brutal by the lives they have to lead, just in order that a few other men may enjoy education and refinement. And then think of their being punished when they commit crimes that they can't help committing. Think of the hard-heartedness with which men everywhere behave to each other,

and the hypocrisy with which it is disguised. That's what I mean.'

Thyrza glanced at him. She was not predisposed to like Mr. Emerson, but this speech of his aroused a certain interest. It recalled to her certain words of Walter Egremont's, spoken when he sat in the parlour in Walnut Tree Walk. Gilbert Grail, too, was wont at times to speak on the same subject. She did not know whether to be glad or troubled that Mr. Emerson should hold the same views.

'You see now, Miss Trent?'

'Yes, I understand.'

'If it were only that one monstrous fact, of women being obliged to work! Isn't that enough to condemn any form of Society which permits it? And people are positively priding themselves on opening new spheres for women, urging them to new kinds of toil! What an unspeakably perverted state of mind that denotes! The sphere of woman is the home. She ought never to be asked to earn money; it is degrading to her.'

'I earn money, Mr. Emerson,' Thyrza replied, with simple earnestness, 'and I don't mind it. Indeed I'm glad to.'

'To be sure you are, Miss Trent, to be sure you are—because you have self-respect. Society being what it is, many women have no choice but to work and earn. Look at poor Clara, fagging all day long, and sometimes half the night, at her music-lessons.

She doesn't mind it a bit ; you can't find a more contented woman. But it's a base necessity that compels her to do it. Society being what it is, such work becomes a virtue ; but the basis is wrong and bad.'

Thyrza reflected. This point of view had never been put to her. She ceased to ply her needle for a few moments.

'That is introductory,' Harold continued. 'I was going to tell you what I am doing, all this time that I seem to sit at home in idleness. Miss Trent, I believe myself—I can't help saying what will sound a little conceited—but, I believe myself to be a poet.'

He paused, to mark the effect of this announcement. Thyrza was not ignorant of the name of poet : Gilbert had talked to her of poets often enough. She looked at the speaker with a genuine surprise, with a reverence which was forced upon her. That a man might declare himself a poet, and not in fact be one, was a possibility which did not occur to her. The dignity was too great to be lightly assumed. Had not Gilbert, speaking of Westminster Abbey, said that poets were greater than kings ?

She could make no kind of reply ; the awe increased upon her in the silence which followed.

'I believe I am a poet, Miss Trent,' Harold went on, leaning forward with zeal in his pale eyes, 'and I am writing a poem !'

'Are you really, Mr. Emerson !'

‘I don’t know what I shall call it. The name matters little. It is a poem on the evils of our social state. I review Society from the highest to the lowest, and judge each rank. I think I have found a new poetical form. It is neither dramatic, nor epic, nor lyric; it includes all these. I know very well that this sounds awfully boastful, and of course, I shouldn’t like you to repeat my words to anyone, Miss Trent. But it is a relief to speak about it to someone besides Clara. Of course she’s known about it from the first. I’ve read a lot to her, and she thinks it very good. Of course she can’t judge it impartially, I know that; but she has a cultivated mind, and she is fond of poetry; and then she wouldn’t say it was good if she really thought it bad.’

‘Oh no,’ interjected the listener, since he seemed to appeal for such assurance.

‘You see, I’ve written poetry of one kind or another ever since I was a boy. But it’s only during the last few years that I came to take an interest in these large subjects, and found what wonderful material they were for poetry. Nobody has really made use of them yet. People ask: “What will be the new form of poetry, when the old are really worked out, and no longer suit the spirit of the age?” I believe I can at all events suggest the answer, in my work. I believe it to be absolutely new. It is written in blank verse, but of lines of different length in different parts of the poem. I believe I have found new effects of metre.’

The man was not entirely an imbecile, and he had in fact considerable acquaintance with English literature; that he should talk thus to a girl whom he knew to be uneducated was partly to be explained by the hunger which drives a vain man to seek admiration in any quarter whatsoever. Then, looking at Thyrsa, it was easily forgotten that she had no acquired knowledge: those downcast eyelids might have veiled the light of a mind which brooded on rich attainments. Remember, too, that a man will always believe in the possibility of appreciation from a woman far more readily than from one of his own sex. If Molière read plays to his housekeeper, I do not believe that it was to test their effect on a lower stamp of intelligence; that were no poet's thought.

Thyrsa listened wondering. She could not follow at all; half the words he used were unintelligible to her. But she received an impression of the grandiose, and certain opinions she had hitherto held with regard to Mr. Emerson began to modify themselves considerably. She had of a certainty observed that Clara was a good wife, but it had seemed to her very doubtful whether Harold could be deemed a good husband. In her humility, she reminded herself now that she had had no right whatever to judge a man so far above her in all respects. She understood now why Mrs. Emerson bore her life of hard work so cheerfully. Was not there someone for whom she herself would toil day and night if need were, and whose infinite superiority



would justify every sacrifice made on his behalf? Yes, but then he would not allow her to sacrifice herself so; impossible to imagine the case. Still, people were so very different; you could not argue from one to another.

‘I wonder,’ Harold pursued, with sudden diffidence; ‘I wonder if you would let me read you some parts? Just a few lines here and there?—I shouldn’t tire you?—just to give you an idea——’

‘Yes, I should be very glad,’ Thyrza said, in confusion at being made of so much account.

He went to a table-drawer, unlocked it, and brought out what to the experienced eye would have been an alarming body of manuscript, sheets of blue foolscap covered with large, sprawly handwriting; there was a certain suggestive likeness between his writing and himself.

‘Don’t be afraid,’ he said, laughing nervously with pleasure, as he pushed his chair into a convenient position. ‘I’ve already got a good deal done; I hope to finish it in a few months; but I’ll only read a scrap from what I think the best parts. I’ll read the pieces that Clara likes best; I put a good deal of faith in her judgment.’

The reading of excerpts from this epico-dramaticodithyrambic poem consumed about an hour and a half. Harold had soon worked himself to such a pitch of excitement that he could not keep his seat; he stood before the fire, his doughy face kneaded by emotion

into unwholesome puffiness; his uncertain voice piped and quavered so that a listener on the other side of the door might have supposed that a Punch-and-Judy performance was going on in the room. What he read was strange and sad stuff, crude to the point of ghastliness, abounding in bathos, so impotently earnest that no burlesque ever written could surpass it in side-splitting effects. Thyrza had at first tried to go on with her sewing at the same time that she listened, but she soon found it impossible. The utter incomprehensibility of everything she heard had a painfully depressing effect upon her; her head began to ache; Harold's occasional pause to ask her how she liked it threw her into a state of painful nervousness, for she dreaded to seem inappreciative, yet could not find words which sounded at all natural.

'You see what I am aiming at in that passage?' Harold would ask, after an outburst of fifty furious lines.

'I'm not sure—I'm afraid——'

'But'—he showed an impatience which terrified Thyrza—'you follow that simile of the Hebrews crossing the Red Sea?'

'Yes,' she hastened to murmur.

'Of course! And do you think I have worked it out well? Does it impress you?'

'Yes, Mr. Emerson.'

'I'm very glad! Now here's a bit quite in a different mood.'

His own hoarseness, and the fever into which he had worked himself, forced him to cease at last. He returned the sheets to the drawer, then flung himself into the chair and moaned. Thyrza was all but ill, and would have given anything to go to her room, but Harold's appearance alarmed her.

'It's been too much for me,' he groaned. 'I'm in such a state of physical weakness that the least agitation all but kills me. But you like it, Miss Trent?'

'Yes—but you know I haven't had much education, Mr. Emerson.'

'That's nothing to do with it! This poem will not appeal, like poetry hitherto, to a small class of cultured people, but to *all* people, to *all* ranks. And that is why I hope so much from it. I am not so foolish as to think that poetry of the ordinary kind can help a man to live nowadays, but I do believe that *this* poem will at once establish me, and enable me to pay Clara back for all her self-devotion. I believe it has only to be printed to sell by the thousand copies! You understand now how I can sit here, seemingly in idleness, whilst my wife works so hard? Clara knows that it's only for a very short time. My illness, which makes it almost impossible for me to do other work, seems to be a help in this; when I am feverish and nervous I write some of my best passages!'

Thyrza murmured her wonder.

'But that's only one aspect of the thing,' Harold pursued. 'The accursed state of Society compels me

to hope for profit from my work, but you mustn't think that I write with pounds, shillings and pence before my mind. I firmly believe that I am doing a service to the world. This poem—it seems arrogant, Miss Trent, but you will see—this poem will do more for social progress than all the preaching and arguing that has gone on since the French Revolution! It comes from my very heart, and it will go to the hearts of others! I believe that a new epoch will date from the publication of this poem. Don't be tempted to laugh at me; I know it is a tremendous claim to make for oneself, but then I shouldn't speak in this way to every one. It's only to Clara and to you that I have told my secret.'

At last she got away, exhausted, unable to think connectedly, longing to lie down and close her eyes. Harold lay back in his chair, suffering a good deal, but taking the ineffable delight of having magnified himself in the eyes of a fellow-mortal, of a very beautiful girl, moreover, who, he felt convinced, was far more appreciative than she would allow herself to seem.

He sat up for Clara's return; she reached home a little after midnight, sinking with fatigue, covered with snow, through which she had walked from Portland Road station. But at the sight of Harold sitting by the fire, in his dressing-gown, with his feet in the fender, a smile came to her face.

'But you promised me not to sit up, Harold! You know how ill you'll be to-morrow. You're a bad boy!

And how have you got through the evening? How long did Miss Trent stay?’

‘Take your things off and sit down to your supper, and I’ll tell you all about it.’

‘No, I had supper before I left. I can’t eat any more. I must sit and warm myself; it’s a dreadful night.’

She brought a buffet close to Harold’s chair, and rested her head against him. He put his arm about her and spoke tenderly.

‘Poor little girl! What a horrible shame it is!’

‘Be quiet! It isn’t a shame at all. Mayn’t I do what I like doing?’

‘Only a very little time longer, then you shall never do a stroke of work all the rest of your life.’

‘Then I shall be very uncomfortable. Say that I’m a good wife and you love me.’

He said it with much sincerity, with many variations on the theme.

‘Well then, do you think I care a bit for anything else? I’m the happiest woman in England! And now tell me about Miss Trent. Was she nice to you? What did you talk about?’

‘Well, what do you think? You won’t be vexed? I read her some of the poem.’

‘Really? You did? And how did she like it? What did she say? I *do* so want to know!’

‘She seemed to like it very much. She didn’t make many remarks about it, but then it naturally astonished

her a good deal ; of course she'd never heard anything of the kind before. It'll take her a little time to think it over and collect her impressions—like it did you at first, you remember.'

' Oh, I shall talk to her about it to-morrow !'

' You don't mind my having read it ?'

' How could I ? I'm delighted ! Did you read much ?'

So they talked for another half-hour, and Clara ended another long day, joyful in the conviction that her husband was the greatest and best man a woman ever loved.

His love for her was genuine enough, all appearances notwithstanding. She was not pretty, not clever, but from the first quarter of an hour spent in his presence she had bowed her spirit before him, and this secret flattery, soon divined by one who has a keen scent for admiration, had the result of making him in love with her. The man who can never inspire tender feeling in a woman of the higher order, but who is consumed by vanity, often has the happy instinct of attaching himself to some poor simple-minded creature who will deem it the greatest privilege to be allowed to worship him, and granted that he does possess human qualities, his affection will often grow by the flattery it feeds on. In all respects a little man, Harold's egoism was not of the tremendous kind which kills pity. He had many an hour of misery, of self-condemnation, in thinking of Clara's existence. The present state of things had

come about gradually, and to a great extent was of Clara's own making. First of all, Harold had in fact fallen ill, and for several weeks could not go to his place of business. Then, when he talked of returning to the warehouse, Clara feared for him and begged him to wait yet a little. She had never entirely given up her teaching, and now she was working harder at it than ever. Harold had a petty store of some thirty or forty pounds; he kept drawing upon this till it was finished. But, before the last of his savings disappeared, he had conceived the fatal idea of his great poem. He talked of it to his wife so persistently, that together they crazed themselves with illusive hopes. There was no real reason now why he should not return to his daily work. Clara encouraged him. They could live very moderately; she would have no difficulty in providing for their wants. And how glad they would both be that the sacrifice had been made when once the end was attained. Humanity at large would tender them its gratitude.

But one day there was a disagreeable interview between Harold and his sister Mabel. The latter had made up her mind that Harold was behaving scandalously, and she told him so. He revealed his secret; she laughed him to scorn. They had high words, and Miss Emerson quitted the house. A mystery to Clara, as you know.

It was a curious thing that Harold always managed to be away from home when a visit from Mrs. Ormonde



was expected. He did not, in fact, care to face that lady. Some day, of course, she would do him justice, but at present her clear, direct gaze was a little trying.

Clara managed to spend an hour with Thyrza on the following day. She longed to hear praise of the poem, and, like her husband, she made no account of Thyrza's obvious incapacity to sit in judgment on high literary matters.

'Don't you think it does Mr. Emerson harm—writing so much?' Thyrza asked, simply.

'Do you think so?' said Clara, with fluttering anxiety. 'I've often been afraid of that—but then he can't help it. He would be far worse if he didn't write. When it's finished, you know, he'll have a good holiday. We shall go away somewhere, to the sea-side.'

'How long will it be before it's finished, Mrs. Emerson?'

'Not more than three months. Such a short time, you know; it goes so quickly. I do hope he'll be able to hold up till then. Did you think he was looking *very* ill, Miss Trent?'

'It seemed to make him worse, the reading, I thought.'

'Yes, it always excites him so, poor fellow. But it is beautiful, isn't it?'

'Oh yes!'

'You know, there's a good deal I can't understand,' Clara said, in timid confidence. 'I'm not at all clever, you know; I do wish I was, for his sake. I wonder'

—she laughed and blushed—‘I wonder how such a clever man ever came to care for me at all.’

Thyrza bent her head, thinking.

‘That doesn’t matter much,’ she said presently. ‘I mean—I think it isn’t always cleverness that——’

‘I understand you, my dear. I think the same, too. I’m sure I hope it. But even when I can’t quite understand, I know—I feel—it’s wonderful and beautiful. He *was* so delighted to read to you; you *did* please him so by liking to hear it. You’ll come again soon?’

‘Some day. I’m very busy. I’ve a great deal of sewing.’

‘But you’ll find an hour. I want you to sing to us again. I *do* so enjoy your singing, Miss Trent.’

Thyrza marvelled long over the great work. But she dreaded to have to listen to fresh readings.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE HEART AND ITS SECRET.

THYRZA wondered much at the way in which her singing-master proceeded with her instruction. She had looked forward to learning new songs, and she was allowed to sing nothing but mere uninteresting scales of notes. A timid question at length elicited one or two abrupt remarks which humbled, but at the same time informed, her. The teacher, like most of his kind, was a poor creature of routine, unburdened by imagination; he had only a larynx to deal with, and was at no pains to realise that the fountain of its notes was a soul. To be sure, that was a thought which he was not accustomed to have forced upon him.

Humbled and informed, Thyrza took her lessons with faultless patience, and with the hopeful zeal which makes light of every difficulty. She felt her voice improving, and when she sang to herself the old songs she was no longer satisfied with the old degree of accuracy. A world of which she had had no suspicion was opening to her; music began to mean something quite different from the bird-warble which was all that she

had known. Moreover, she began to have an inkling of the value of her voice. Mrs. Ormonde had scarcely with a word commended her singing, and had spoken of the lessons as something that might be useful, with no more emphasis. The master, of course, had only praise or blame for the individual exercise. But there was some one in the house who felt bound by no considerations of prudence; Clara, hearing Thyrza's notes, was entranced by them, and of course took the first opportunity of saying so.

'You really think I have a good voice?' Thyrza asked once, when they had grown accustomed to each other.

'You have a splendid voice, Miss Trent!' replied Clara, who delighted in bestowing praise.

'Do you think I shall really be able to sing some day—I mean, to people?'

'Why not? I fancy people will be only too anxious to get you to sing.'

'In—in places like St. James's Hall?' Thyrza asked, her ears tingling at her audacity.

'Some day, I've no doubt whatever.'

And very soon after that evening when Harold read from his poem, yet a new prospect was opened to Thyrza. Clara asked her if she would not like to play the piano; it was late to begin, but not hopelessly late. Thyrza flushed with joy, but at once fell into doubt.

'I can't take your time, Mrs. Emerson.'

'Nonsense! Why, I shall be that glad you can't

think! I have such stupid girls to deal with, it will freshen me up wonderfully to teach some one like you. Oh, I can tell you such a laughable story about some people in St. John's Wood! I did make Mrs. Ormonde laugh so over it. You know, I go to two families, the Potters and the Budges, who know each other. Well, one day Mrs. Potter said to me, with a queer look: "And how do the young Budges get on, Mrs. Emerson?" "Oh, pretty well," I said, for I couldn't say more. "Ah!" said Mrs. Potter, "you won't find talent *there*!" Well now, the very next day I was at the Budges, and Mrs. Budge asks: "And how do the young Potters get on?" I answered in the same way. "Ah!" she said, "you won't find genius *there*!" But come, you'll begin, won't you?'"

Thyrza decided that she must first ask Mrs. Ormonde's permission. This was readily accorded, though with warning not to work too hard. Practice-time was to be when Harold was taking his exercise in the park.

The warning against working too hard was not needless. Thyrza sewed, as a rule, for six hours a day, save of course on the days when she went to the Home. For her leisure she had found so much occupation that she seldom went to bed before midnight. In her walk to the omnibus which took her to Hampstead, she had to pass a second-hand book-shop, and it became her habit to put aside sixpence a week—more she could not—for the purchasing of books. With no one to guide her

choice, and restricted as she was in the matter of price, she sometimes made strange acquisitions. She avoided story-books, and bought only such as seemed to her to contain solid matter—history by preference, having learned from Gilbert that history was the best thing to study. Over these accumulating volumes she spent many a laborious hour. At first it was very hard to keep awake much after ten o'clock; eyelids *would* grow so heavy, and the coil of golden hair seem such a burden on the brain. But she strove with her drowsiness, and, like other students, soon made the grand discovery that, the fit once over, one is wider awake than ever. What hard, hard things she read! 'Tytler's Universal History,' in one fat little small-typed volume, very much spoilt by rain, she made a vade-mecum; the 'Annals of the Orient, of Greece, of Rome'—with difficulty not easily estimated she worked her way through them. An English Dictionary became a necessity; she had to wait three weeks before she had money enough to purchase the cheapest she could find. At the very beginning of Tytler were such terrible words: *chronological*, and *epitome*, and *disquisitions*, and *exemplification*.

'If I had some one to ask, what time it would save me! Wouldn't *he* help me? Wouldn't *he* be glad to tell me what long words mean?'

Never mind, she would do it by herself. She had brains. Poor Gilbert had so often said that she could learn anything in time. So the lamp burned on till midnight. Compendious old Tytler! In his grave it

should have given him both joy and sorrow that so sweet a face grew paler over his long hard words.

Had she not her reward before her? Two years; in one way it would be all too short a time. Not an hour must be lost. And when the two years had come full circle, and some morning she was told that someone wished to see her, and she went down into the sitting-room, and he, he stood before her, then she would say, 'This and this I have done, thus hard have I striven, for your sake, because I love you better than my own soul!'

That secret: no one must suspect it; no, not even Lyddy. After a hard night's work she would wake up feeling yet weary, her brain dull, and a strange pain at her heart—the pain that came so often; but, whilst her thoughts were struggling to consciousness, she felt that there was some joy beyond the present pain. And, behold! with sense of the new day came ever renewed hope. She rose, and a bright angel circled her with protecting, comforting arms. Dark or sunny, for her the morning had its golden rays.

How near he sometimes might be to her! She knew nothing of Egremont's having left England; Lydia did not, and would scarcely have mentioned the name even if she had known. Thyrsa thought of himself as always very near. There was a possibility that she might by chance see him. It would have been very dear to her to see him at a distance, but she dreaded lest he should see her. That would spoil all. No, it



was a sacred compact. Two years—two whole years—had to be lived through, and then no one could say a word against their meeting.

She would be able to sing to him, then. If her voice proved good enough for her to sing in a concert, like *the* concert at St. James's Hall, would he not be proud of her? Artist's soul that she had, she never gave it a thought that, if she became his wife, he might prefer that she should not sing in public. She imagined herself before a great hall of people, singing, yet singing in truth to one only. But all the others must hear and praise, that he might have joy of her power.

Yet there would be the hour, also, for singing to him alone—they two alone together. Would not her song be then the most glorious? Not with her own voice, but with the voice of very love, would she utter her hymn of gladness and worship. And he would praise her in few words—more with looks than with words. And again she would say: 'So I can sing, and no one can sing like me; but only because I sing for you, and with my soul I love you!'

She could not often be sorrowful, and never for long together, even in thinking of the past. Yes, one day there was of unbroken grief, the day on which she received, through Mrs. Ormonde as always, the letter wherein Lydia told her of Mr. Boddy's death. On that day she shed bitter tears. Lydia spared her all that was most painful. She said that the old man had fallen insensible by the Pooles' house, had been taken

in by them, and had died. She said that just before the end he uttered Thyrza's name. And Thyrza had thought too seldom of Mr. Boddy, to whom she and her sister owed so much. Had she hastened his death—she now asked herself—by bringing upon him a great grief? The common remorse, the common vain longings, assailed her. Even in the old days she had somewhat slighted him; she had never shown him such love and care as Lydia always did. And the poor old man was buried, with so much of her past.

Only one little shadow there was that fell upon her at times when she thought of Egremont. What was that question of Mrs. Ormonde's—a question asked in the overheard conversation? 'Have you altogether forgotten Annabel?' And Walter's reply had shown that he did once love someone named Annabel. He had asked her to marry him, and she—strange beyond thought!—had refused him. Thyrza believed—she could not be quite sure, but she believed—that she had heard Mrs. Ormonde address Miss Newthorpe by that name. She remembered Miss Newthorpe very distinctly, her refined beauty, her delightful playing; strangely, too, she had associated Egremont with that lady in the thoughts she had after her return from Eastbourne. If that were Annabel, did there remain no fear? If he had once loved her, might not the love revive? He and she would meet—doubtless, would meet. Her beauty, her accomplishments, would be present, and

was there no danger to the newer love if that memory were frequently brought back ?

If he had not loved Annabel, be she who she might ! If this love for herself had been his first love, how thankful she would have been. The love she gave him was her first ; never had she loved Gilbert Grail, though she had thought her friendship for him deserved the dearer name. Her first love, truly, and would it not be her last ?

Very often, when she had sat down to her book, thoughts of this kind would come and distract her. What to her were the kings of old eastern lands, the conquests of Rome, the long chronicles dense with forgotten battle and woe ? So easily she could have yielded to her former habits, and have passed hour after hour in reverie. What—she wondered now—had she dreamed of in those far-off days ? Was it not foresight of the mystery one day to rule her life ? Had she not visioned these sorrows and these priceless joys, when as yet unable to understand them ? Indeed, sometimes there seemed no break between then and now. She longed unconsciously for what was now come, that was all. Everything had befallen so naturally, so inevitably, step by step, a rising from vision to vision.

Would the future perfect her life's progress ?

But Lydia was not forgotten. To her she wrote long letters, telling all that she might tell. The one thing of which she would most gladly have spoken to her sister must never be touched upon. For in one

respect Lydia was against her—fixedly against her; she had come to know that too well. Lydia bitterly resented Egremont's coming between her sister and Gilbert; she hoped his name would never again be spoken, and that all remembrance of him would pass away. This made no difference to Thyrza's love. When she met Lydia it was always with the same passionate joy. Their meetings took place in a private room at the hotel Mrs. Ormonde always used. Lydia never made any inquiry; whatever she might tell about herself, Thyrza had to tell unasked. It would have made a great difference had there been no secret to keep beyond that comparatively unimportant one of where Thyrza was living. But Thyrza resolved to breathe no word till the two years were gone by. Would it, then, make a coldness between her and her sister? It should not; her happiness should not have that great flaw.

When the spring came, Thyrza knew a falling off in her health. The pain at her heart gave her more trouble, and she had days of such physical weakness that she could do little work. With the reviving year her passion became a yearning of such intensity that it seemed to exhaust her frame. For all her endeavours it was seldom during these weeks that she could give attention to her books; even her voice failed for a time, and when she resumed the suspended lessons, she terrified her teacher by fainting just as he was taking leave of her. Mrs. Ormonde came, and there was a very grave conversation between her and Dr. Lambe, who was again

attending Thyrza. It was declared that the latter had been over-exerting herself; work of all kind was prohibited for a season. And when a week or two brought about little, if any, improvement, Thyrza was taken to Eastbourne, to her old quarters in Mrs. Guest's house.

There Lydia spent two days with her.

The elder sister could not give herself to full enjoyment of these days. Much as she delighted to be with Thyrza, there was always one and the same drawback to her pleasure in the meetings. Thyrza was so unfeignedly cheerful that Lydia could by no effort get rid of her suspicion that she was being deceived. She shrank from reopening the subject, because it was so disagreeable to her to pronounce Egremont's name; because, too, she could not betray doubt without offending Thyrza. It was hard to distrust Thyrza, yet how account for the girl's most strange apparent happiness? Even now, though under troubled health, her sister's spirits were good. Far more easily Lydia could have suspected Mrs. Ormonde of some duplicity, yet here she was checked by instincts of gratitude, and by a sense of shame. Mrs. Ormonde did not certainly impress her as likely to be deceitful. Still, though she would not specify accusation, Lydia felt, was convinced indeed, that something very material was being kept from her. It was a cruel interference with the completeness of her sympathy in all the conversation between Thyrza and herself.

‘So you are friends again with Mary Bower,’ Thyrza

said, soon after they had met. 'Do you go and have tea with her on Sundays sometimes?'

'No, she comes to me.'

'And you go to chapel?'

Thyrza laughed, seeing Lydia look down.

'Poor Lyddy, what a trial it always was to you! Do you mind it so much now?'

They were sitting on the beach. Lydia picked up pebbles and threw them away.

'I don't think about it as I used to, Thyrza,' she replied, quietly, after a short pause. 'I go now because I like to go.'

'Do you, dear?' Thyrza said, doubtfully, feeling there was a change and not understanding it. 'You always liked the singing you know.'

'Yes, I like the singing. But there's more than that. I like it all now.'

'Do you?' said Thyrza, in yet a more uncertain voice.

Lydia looked up and smiled brightly.

'We won't talk about it now, dearest. Some day we will, though—a good long talk. When we are again together. If we ever shall be together again, Thyrza.'

'I think so, Lyddy. I hope so. At all events we shall see each other very often.'

'Very often? Not always together?'

Thyrza was silent, but said presently:

'Perhaps. We can't tell, Lyddy.'

‘But you don’t *think* we shall. You don’t *hope* we shall.’

Thyrza did not speak.

‘No,’ Lydia went on, very sadly, ‘that’s all over and gone. There’s something between us, and now there always will be, always. It’s very hard for me to lose you like this.’

‘Don’t speak about it now, Lyddy,’ her sister murmured. ‘It isn’t true that there’ll always be something between us. You’ll see. But don’t speak about it now, dear.’

Lydia brightened, and found other subjects. Then Thyrza said :

‘You never told me, Lyddy, what it was that first made you break off with Mary. You know you never would tell me. Is it still a secret?’

‘No. I can tell you if you like.’

‘Please, do.’

‘It was because Mary spoke against Mr. Ackroyd. I still don’t think that she ought to have spoken as she did, and Mary owns she was unkind ; but I understand better now what she meant.’

‘What was it she said?’

‘It was about his having no religion, and that, because he had none, he did things he couldn’t have done if he’d felt in the right way.’

‘Yes, I understand,’ Thyrza mused. She added : ‘He’s still not married?’

‘No.’



‘Why not?—Lyddy, I don’t believe they ever will be married.’

‘And I don’t either, dear.’

Thyrza looked quickly at her sister. Lydia was again playing with pebbles, not quite smiling, but nearly.

‘You don’t. Then what has happened? Won’t you tell me?’

‘I don’t think they suit each other.’

‘But there’s something else, I’m sure there is. You said, “And I don’t either,” in such a queer way. How do you know they don’t suit each other?’

‘Since grandad’s death, you know, I’ve often been to Mrs. Poole’s. She tells me things sometimes. You mustn’t think I ever ask, Thyrza. You know that isn’t my way. But Mrs. Poole often speaks about her brother. Only two days ago, she told me he wasn’t going to marry Totty.’

‘Really? And I don’t think you’d have said a word about it if I hadn’t made you! It’s broken off for good?’

‘I believe it is.’

Neither spoke for a while. Then Thyrza said:

‘I suppose you see Mr. Ackroyd sometimes at the house?’

‘Sometimes,’ the other replied, heedlessly.

‘Does he talk to you, Lyddy?’

‘A little. Just a little, sometimes.’

‘But *why* has he broken off with Totty? What does Totty say about it?’

‘I believe she was the first to ask him to break off. I met her a week ago, and she looked very jolly, as if something good had happened to her. I suppose she’s glad to be free again.’

‘How queer it all is, Lyddy. Now you might mention things like this in your letters. If there’s anything else of the same kind happens, remember you tell me.’

‘I don’t see how there can be. Unless they begin over again.’

‘Well, mind you tell me if they do—and if they don’t.’

On the second day of Lydia’s visit, they heard from The Chestnuts that Bessie Bunce was dead. She had died suddenly, and just when she seemed to be in better health than for years.

Thyrza, speaking of the event with Lydia, said gravely :

‘I can’t feel sorry. It’s a good thing to die like that, with no pain and no looking forward.’

‘Oh, do you think so, Thyrza? There’s something dreadful in the suddenness to me.’

‘To me it’s just the opposite. I’m afraid of death. I don’t think I could sit by anybody that was dying. I hope, I hope I may die in that way!’

Lydia was shocked, and wondered grieving.

## CHAPTER VII.

‘MARK BUT MY FALL!’

PROBABLY no illusion can vie in pathetic intensity and in grotesqueness of manifestation with that of the actually weak-minded mortal who conceives himself poetically inspired. To the diagnosis of such cases, familiar enough throughout the ages, modern times have added a feature especially alarming, hinting as it does at fatality of result. Harold Emerson's outlook would have been far less afflicting had he trodden the well-worn path of subjective lyricism ; the young man—above all, the young married man—who labours at a mighty poem which is to call back to earth that virgin sung of old, and the Saturnia Regna, has reached a pass which demands the desperate recourse to steel and cautery. The surgeon was just now nearer than Harold knew. The hands to which the operation was entrusted were, strangely enough, used only to the needle, but when the occasion offered, they did their sterner work effectually.

One symptom in Harold's case seemed to distinguish it sensibly from those of his fellow-sufferers. He not only dreamed of penning verses by the hundred, but, as

we know, he performed the feat. It is not usual to find a lofty purpose of this colour take visible form; the self-anointed poet as a rule fortunately lacks that endurance of labour for want of which even the true bard may betray his trust. Harold, however, had done much rhyming since his infancy, and the genuineness of his belief in the work he was now engaged upon—together with the fact that he was writing in blank verse—upheld him through all temptations of the flesh to indolence. Moreover, he was often sincerely troubled by the thought of what his wife was bearing for his sake, and such fits of conscience could only be dispelled by vigorous blackening of foolscap. Another symptom of troubled conscience was his determination to believe himself still an invalid. As such, it was just pardonable that he should allow Clara to toil for him, and any mental labour he performed became of itself meritorious.

For a long time he had been within three months of the end of his task; now at last the months began to convert themselves into weeks. And as he in truth drew near to the point at which he would prevail upon himself to write 'Finis'—no easy point for decision when one dreams of a renovated universe—he found the temptation ever greater to throw back the mantle in which he had so long wrapped himself, and let something of his glory shine forth upon the immediate circle of his friends. He had first yielded in the instance of Thyrza. Now that Thyrza was absent for a time, he was driven irre-

sistibly to seek another whom he might stagger by the grandeur of his production. And, with this infatuation to be looked for, he decided that it should be his elder sister. He wrote to Miss Emerson, hinting at vague and great things, and summoned her to an interview when Clara was away from home.

Miss Emerson came. She had been on the point of visiting her brother spontaneously, for news of his prolonged idleness had reached her from time to time, and indignation wrought within her. She arrived one morning at eleven o'clock. Harold was smoking cigarettes—he had a theory that tobacco taken in this form most aided poetic production—and he received his sister with lofty mien, which implied pardon for her gross behaviour at their parting, more than a year ago, and growth of conscious dignity. Miss Emerson had no beauty; she was a tall, ill-draped, resolute-looking young woman, with a good deal of care on her brow and about her lips.

'How is it you're at home at this time of day?' she began by asking.

'I always am,' he replied, smiling calmly.

'Yes, so I've heard. And it seems you're not ashamed to own it. What do you want with me?'

'I want you to sit down and be quiet for a quarter of an hour or so, Mabel. I have something to read to you.'

'To read?' she said, with contemptuous doubt.

'To read, Mabel. Will you listen?'

He affected extreme suavity. Suavity becomes the poet unrecognised by little people.

‘I hope,’ she said, ‘it’s a letter begging them to take you back at the warehouse.’

‘No, not that. I shall not say definitely what it is. I wish you to hear, and to form your own conclusions. You have a good judgment; I have always put much faith in it. But do not speak till I cease reading.’

Even the inspired one cannot help descending a little, to conciliate favour. But Miss Emerson’s distrust was only heightened.

‘Do you mean to say you’re going to read what you call poetry?’ she burst forth, indignantly. ‘You’ve brought me here for that?’

Harold, so great a point being at issue, could command prudence. He said:

‘Very well. I won’t read. It doesn’t matter. I won’t keep you any longer.’

Miss Emerson had no choice but to feel at once curious. After a rather angry discussion, Harold was prevailed upon to resume his purpose. After a pause of several minutes, he began to read. Almost indifferent at first, he warmed at the sound of his own prophetic utterances, and was soon declaiming with much fervour. His sister kept her eyes sunk. When at length he ceased, and waited in silence for her remarks, a tremulous smile on his lips, she said:

‘And why have you read me that?’

‘Because it’s from a long poem I’ve all but finished.’

He deemed it enough, though her voice had warned him of what was to come.

'You call that poetry, do you?' Miss Emerson asked, with severe irony.

'I do.'

'Well, I call it windy rubbish, and you certainly ought to be ashamed to read it to anyone. This is what you've been spending a year and a half over, is it?'

Harold was shaken, but could still smile, and his smile grew more and more scornful, combative. There ensued a scene even more tempestuous than that which had formerly led to their parting. Miss Emerson spared her brother no home-truth, and, without losing her good manners, she had much keenness of tongue at command. Having expressed her whole feeling on the various questions at issue, she quitted the house.

But this time she did not allow the matter to stop here. Reaching her lodgings, she wrote a lengthy letter to Clara, in which the incidents of the morning were recounted, and Harold's poem criticised. The critical remarks would have done credit to a practised reviewer; they were incisive 'to a degree.' Poor Clara, as it chanced, received this letter without her husband's knowledge, and she did not speak of it to him. It cost her much secret weeping. She replied, in a manner less skilful than Miss Emerson's, but certainly with no less vigour. In a variety of phrases, hot from the heart, Miss Emerson was bidden to mind her own business.

Harold had affected equanimity under his sister's



lash, but, after her departure he sat for some hours in that state of black despondency to which the poet is so subject. When he could think of comfort at all, his mind turned, not as it would have done till recently to his wife, but to Thyrza. Herein no one will fail to recognise another proof of the genuineness of his claim to be a poet. In fact, since the first reading of his verses aloud to Thyrza, he had occupied himself much with her. Gradually it had become clear to him that good fortune had sent to his hearth the one thing he needed to complete his equipment, a living Muse. Once he had regarded Clara in that light, but Clara so obviously failed to sustain the character now that the true divinity had come. No mortal could deny Thyrza's surpassing beauty ; to Harold she seemed endowed with corresponding gifts of spirit. She said very little about his poetry, but with what rapt attention she had heard him on the various occasions when he read ! She could not even sew ; the needle fell from her fingers. And her pure face spoke such deep, undemonstrative delight !

At a crisis such as the present, only Thyrza could come to his aid. It was most unhappy that she should be absent. But her return was counted upon in a few days. He longed for the hour.

Nor did he write until that hour came. For one thing, he suffered not a little real discouragement ; then, he had convinced himself that only the sight of Thyrza could bring back his inspiration. From thinking of her very sentimentally, he passed all at once to a cult of

that species which is commonly the poet's greatest stay. Innocent fellow, he had no dream of anything that could have caused his wife real uneasiness. He would allow himself to worship Thyrza, that was all. He loved Clara, and was endlessly grateful to her, but Clara could not give him what he needed at present. He could not sit at her feet, and see the empyrean in her eyes; for she was not beautiful, though infinitely good. Of Thyrza he could dream till his foolish soul gave forth foolish tears. He would tell Thyrza everything, and behold, with a smile, with a little word of high assurance, she would make doubt be as though it had never existed. He would breathe no word to Clara; her affectionate but weak consolation would spoil that which Thyrza kept for him. Thyrza, it was more than possible, thought of him much and with deep interest. She was very noble-minded and never would she betray interest of the kind that was forbidden, but doubtless she exulted in hope for her poet. Could he not somehow address her in his poem—a few lines of lofty feeling, such as Shelley would have written? She would read and understand—no one else would.

So with the utmost impatience he awaited her return. The hour at which they might expect her was at last announced, and Harold worked himself into a feverish condition on that day. He shut himself up, and gave way to flabby ecstasies. She came in the evening; Clara, to her husband's great disgust, happened to be at home. Harold could only touch her hand

and gaze, purposely refraining from speech. He had persuaded himself that speech was impossible.

Thyrza had a meal with the two, then went to her room. Change of scene always wearied her with emotion, and she was glad to sit alone, to look at her books and promise herself a renewal of work on the morrow. But Clara came to her.

Clara was very miserable. She, too, had longed for Thyrza's home-coming, for, unable to speak to Harold of the letter she had received, she must yet speak to someone, and who so good for the purpose as Thyrza. She too, good simple creature, had made much of Thyrza in her imagination; a woman, she felt the vast capacity for love that was in this girl's nature, and yearned to rest a little against the warm heart. The weariness she would not admit even to herself, had this effect; it troubled her far more than of wont since her sister-in-law's cruel attack upon Harold.

'Do I disturb you?' she said, on entering. 'May I come for a few minutes?'

Thyrza could not repel her. She smiled kindly, and was at once ready to give all the sympathy she could. By degrees, Clara worked round to the grievous subject; then she produced the letter. But Thyrza begged not to be pressed to read it.

'I'd so much rather not, Mrs. Emerson. It's enough what you've told me.'

'Then I must read parts to you,' pleaded the other; 'you'd never believe what she says. I do really think

she wants to separate Harold and me. Perhaps her mother has persuaded her to behave in this way. She knows that she can do nothing more cruel than pretend to ridicule Harold's poem. It was so natural of Harold to want to read it to his sister, wasn't it? Think of her paying him back in this shameful way! Of course he hasn't said a word of it to me; I didn't know she'd been here. He's so good; he spares me everything. But do listen to these shameful words!'

She read some of the most caustic of Miss Emerson's remarks. Good soul, it never occurred to her that Thyrsa could receive them with anything but indignation. And Thyrsa was obliged to pretend that feeling, though in reality she was surprised to find that someone else had had the courage to say what she had only felt as a kind of misery and vague distaste.

'I shall feel so much easier now,' Clara said. 'Now I shall burn the horrid letter. I wrote back very angrily, very angrily indeed. Wasn't I right?'

'You couldn't do anything else, Mrs. Emerson.'

So the poor woman went away in a measure comforted.

Mrs. Ormonde had prescribed an hour's walk in Regent's Park every sunny morning, and Thyrsa, though she never cared to go out, was scrupulously obedient. On the following morning she put on her things a little before midday and went into the green open spaces, entering by Gloucester Gate. She had not walked

more than a hundred yards when a footstep overtook her. She looked up and saw that Harold was by her side.

He was in a rapturous mood.

‘How the sunshine inspirits one!’ he began by exclaiming. ‘I couldn’t resist it; I had to come out. And how glad we are to have you back, Miss Trent!’

Thyrza was annoyed at not being permitted to walk alone, but nothing more than that. She answered pleasantly, accepting his expression as one of genuine kindness. Then he began, as always, to talk of himself, and, as he talked, he fell into a tone of melancholy. They reached the broad walk, and, pacing under the shade of trees, Harold at length found voice for all his woes. Thyrza was seriously troubled. From regarding Harold with wonder and modified disapproval, she was now beginning to dislike him. She believed firmly all that Miss Emerson said about his poetry; that letter had put her own shapeless instincts into form. Naturally, the next thing was to be unjust to him; it was inevitable that she should accuse him of deliberate and contemptible selfishness. Yet she could not be other than civil; even had she possessed the due command of thoughts and language, she had no right whatever to rebuke him. The situation fretted and distressed her.

‘You’ll soon have finished it, I hope,’ was all she could say, speaking of the poem.

To Harold it was the utterance of the oracle;

ambiguity has always strengthened the faith of those consulting the priestess.

'You're right!' he exclaimed, blessing her with a look. 'That's the way to settle it! Let them see the result, when the poem is once before the world.'

He became as joyous as till then he had been down-hearted. He began to talk as if the poem were already published, and his greatness declared to all men. Sacrifices had been made, but not in vain. Only think of what such a man as himself must have suffered, toiling day after day in a city warehouse! He was not made for that kind of thing: Thyrza must feel that he was not. Well, well, it was all over and done with—'portion and parcel of the dreadful past,' he quoted.

Then to loftier subjects. Did Thyrza ever think of the future of the world? He was sure she did; of course he understood that she never talked lightly on the subject. He developed his form of optimism. It was poetry that would reconstitute civilisation. His own poem was the first great example in a kind that would henceforth be as much cultivated as war-epics and love-lyrics in the past. He had no cut-and-dried theory for Society; his it was to work upon the spirit. Poets led the world; administrators saw to the details of the march.

Thyrza said she must turn back. He looked at her, and bent his steps to hers.

'You can't think how glad I am that you are at home again, Miss Trent!' he exclaimed. 'I call it



your home, you see ; I'm sure I hope you think of it as such. I—we could scarcely think of it as *our* home without you, now.'

Thyrza had become silent ; she was weary ; the sound of his voice harassed her. Yet she had to bear with it all the way back.

Three days after this, she was practising at the piano, labouring over finger-exercises with determination. The door opened and Harold came in.

Thyrza at once stopped playing, and made as though she would collect her music.

'Pray, pray, don't let me interrupt you!' Harold cried. 'I'm going out again. I've only come to fetch a book.'

She touched a note here and there, nervous at his presence. He seemingly could not find his book ; he was approaching her.

'What tedious work that must be at first!' he said.

Thyrza noticed a strangeness in his voice. She let her hands fall, and sat mute, gazing at her exercise. He stood behind her ; she heard him breathe.

'I used to play things like that myself,' he continued, still in the same uncertain voice. 'I believe I used the same book.'

He bent forward, as if to examine the page. Then Thyrza felt a warm touch on her temple, and, as a thrill of dread and horror went through her, she recognised that he had touched her with his lips. She started up.



‘Mr. Emerson! What do you want? What do you mean?’

She did not know what words fell from her stammering lips.

‘Oh, do forgive——! I didn’t mean——I couldn’t help it!’

As he babbled, she had fled from the room.

He stood the picture of ignoble fear. His face was like clay; his lips shook together. It was half true that he had not been able to help what he did, yet the very fact was that he had come into the room with this very intention. The poor fellow had fooled himself to such a pitch of extravagance, that a species of craze positively drove him to have a scene of this kind with Thyrsa. He had acted it all out by himself. He would kiss her forehead—as in a moment of frenzy—and then would implore her forgiveness, would explain, would consent to anything to win her respect. It was the kind of thing a poet ought to go through, at least once in his life; in these matters, *noblesse oblige*! He had fully persuaded himself that Thyrsa thought of him tenderly; in this sense he explained her silence whenever she was with him. She could not refuse to pardon him. And, when it came to the actual doing, he *was* tempted out of his senses; in spite of terror, he kissed her temple. The fragrance of her beauty had intoxicated him.

But now he could have grovelled on the carpet in his misery of repentance, of apprehension. She would

tell Clara; she would leave the house; Mrs. Ormonde would be informed. Great Heavens! what would befall him? What would Clara say or do? Would she abandon him? If so, he was a lost man. Why had he made such an unspeakable fool of himself? As if he cared one scrap for this girl in comparison with his wife and his home and his comfort!

Poor bard! Have not many learnt this difference between anticipation and after-thought? One need not even be a poet to go through the experience most completely.

And Thyrza sat weeping. It was horrible to her that any man should have touched her with his lips since that hour when she vowed her life to the one love. She felt degraded. Not even when she lived in Walnut Tree Walk and associated with working people had anyone dared to take such a liberty. It confirmed what she had come to think of Emerson. She determined to leave the house; she began to take her things out of the drawers and pack them. She would go at once to Eastbourne and explain what had happened.

Then there came knocking at her door, gentle but persistent knocking. She ran in terror and turned the key. She heard a voice, subdued but urgent.

‘Miss Trent! I beg you’ll come out and let me speak!—Miss Trent! One word!’

She sat down trembling and ill. For a long time

the whisper at the door continued, and she made no answer. Then there was silence.

When calmness returned, she understood all that it would mean to these two people if she left them thus and declared her reason. She thought of Mrs. Emerson, who, poor woman, had hardships enough already. But what help? How could she ever enter a room where that man was? How could she feel safe under this roof?

A long time passed. She could not go on packing her clothes, and was held in wretched perplexity. It was late in the afternoon—she had sent away the servant who had brought her dinner, saying she wanted nothing—when another knock sounded at her door, and Clara's voice spoke. Thyrsa admitted her.

Clara had but just entered, and still wore her bonnet.

'They tell me you're ill, dear,' she began anxiously. 'You wouldn't have any dinner. What can I do for you? What can I get you?'

Thyrsa, exhausted and unhappy, shed a few tears. It was impossible to injure Clara. She pretended a headache. The other was inexhaustible in kindness. She too, it turned out, had had a morning of trouble. One of her best pupils was obliged to leave London suddenly and for good; a most important source of income was unexpectedly stopped. It was very hard, she said; she might have to work a long time before finding another engagement so good. But then why

after all need she trouble? Was not the poem all but finished?

Thyrza kept her room till the next day. Then she had thought everything out very clearly, and an idea had come to her which gave her strength to go through a scene otherwise unendurable. She waited till it was certain that Clara had gone out, then, with much heart-beating (and the sad pain that such agitation always cost her), she descended to the sitting-room.

Harold was in his usual chair, but this morning he smoked no cigarette. He looked really ill. With difficulty he had obliged Clara to go out and leave him. At Thyrza's entrance he sprang up and reddened before her over all his unwholesome face. Thyrza closed the door and walked towards him with outward calmness.

'How good of you, Miss Trent!' he began, in a voice close upon tears. 'You're come to say you forgive me! How shall I beg you to forget it? Anything, anything you ask!'

Thyrza regarded him, beautiful, strong enough now, for she knew her power. He was a miserable creature, and she could punish him for his own good.

'Do you mean that, Mr. Emerson?' she said, very quietly. 'Do you mean you're ready to do anything I ask?'

'Miss Trent, I promise it solemnly! I'm bitterly ashamed of myself. I've insulted you, and yet the truth is I respect you as much as I respect my own wife. I

mean that I wouldn't—I couldn't do such a thing again. Anything you ask, if you'll forget it.'

'Then I shall really ask something,' she said, simply, her eyes falling before his. 'It's something I know you *ought* to do, or I wouldn't ask it. And of course I couldn't but for this. I think you ought to go and take your work again, your work in the City. I think Mrs. Emerson has to work far too hard; I pity her, and I've often wished I could say what I thought. That's what I want you to do.'

Only two years, not two years, since we first saw Thyrza, but between the child she was then, and the firm, clear-spirited woman she showed herself in this interview, a great distance lay, and many changes. Harold Emerson would not forget her face and her words.

'But—but,' he panted, aghast, 'I have as good as finished the——'

She could not be cruel. It was enough to interrupt him gently.

'Never mind that, Mr. Emerson. If you've so little to do, you can do it in the evenings. And then, if it makes you rich, no one would want you to go to the City. But you said you'd do whatever I asked.'

'Yes—yes——'

'You must remember, if I can't trust your word I can't keep on living here.'

'I do—I do remember, Miss Trent! You can trust me! I'll go and see the people this afternoon,

and tell them I've got my health back again. As you say, I can finish the poem at nights ; you know that it *must* be finished.'

'So you've promised me.'

'I have—I have !'

'Then I'm very glad I've been able to help your wife so much. Think of her a little more, Mr. Emerson ; I'm sure she deserves it.'

And Thyrsa turned and left him. He wanted to make speeches ; she gave him no opportunity. She returned to her room, and to her sewing—the pain at her heart making her feel faint.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## A LOAN ON SECURITY.

YET again it was summer-time, the second summer since the parting between Lydia and her sister, all but the end of the second twelvemonth since the day when Thyrza had heard something that was not meant for her ears. In Walnut Tree Walk the evening was clear and warm. A man was going along the street selling flowers in pots; his donkey-cart was covered with leaf and bloom, and with a geranium under each arm, he trudged onwards, bellowing. Children were playing at five-stones on the pavement; you heard an organ away in Keunington Road.

Lydia was having tea and trimming a bonnet at the same time; the bonnet belonged to Mrs. Poole, and the work on it was for friendship's sake. Only on that understanding had Lydia consented to do it. Mrs. Poole had frequently wished to give her an odd job at needle-work for which she herself either had not time or lacked the skill, and to pay for it as she would have had to pay anyone else. For some reason, Lydia declined to do



anything for her on those conditions ; she would help as a friend, but not otherwise.

She was hurrying, for she wanted to take the bonnet to Paradise Street by eight o'clock, and it was now half-past seven. Her face had the air of thoughtful contentment which best became it. Her window was open, and, as in the old days, there were flower-pots on the sill. Her eye now and then rested for a moment on the little patches of colour ; she did not think of the flowers, but they helped pleasantly to tone her mind. Even so will a strain of music sometimes pass through the memory, unmarked by us, yet completing the happiness of some peaceful hour.

She drank her last drop of tea, and, almost simultaneously, put her last touch to the bonnet. Then she prepared herself for going out, hummed a tune whilst she carefully packed the piece of head-gear in its band-box, and went on her way.

When Mrs. Poole answered her knock at the house-door, Lydia said :

‘ I hope you’ll like it. I shall see you on Sunday, and you’ll tell me then.’

‘ But where are you going ? Why won’t you come in ? ’

‘ Oh, I have to buy something.’

‘ Come in for a minute, then.’

‘ No, thank you ; not to-night.’

‘ Do as I tell you ! ’ said the other, with good-natured persistence. ‘ I believe you’re ashamed of your work,

and that's why you're running away. Come in at once.'

Lydia yielded, though seemingly with reluctance. They went down into the kitchen, where the two young Pooles were at an uproarious game.

'Now there's been just about enough of that!' exclaimed their mother, raising her voice to be heard. 'Miss Trent 'll think we have a bear-garden down here. You must play quietly, or off you go to bed—I mean it!'

The bonnet was taken forth and examined, with many ejaculations of delight from its owner. The only article of attire upon which Mrs. Poole ever spent a thought was her bonnet, a noteworthy instance of the contradictoriness of human nature, seeing that it was the rarest thing for her to leave the house, save when she ran out at night to make purchases, and then she always donned an object of straw, whose utility was its only merit. Though as happy a woman as you could have found in Lambeth, she seldom had a moment of leisure from getting-up to bedtime. Her kind are very numerous. Such women pass through a whole summer without an hour of leisure in the sunshine, and often through a married lifetime without going beyond the circle of neighbouring streets.

But the bonnet delighted her. She tried it on, and, having placed a looking-glass on the table, went through the wonderful feat in which women are so skilled, that of seeing the back of her head. Then,

having constrained Lydia to sit down, she pursued multifarious occupations, talking the while.

‘I hope you don’t notice any bad smells in the house,’ she said; ‘there’s Luke at his usual work, upstairs. What pleasure he can find in that is more than I can understand. I know he’s ruined my table with his chemicals. There’s Jacky with him, too. If I was Mr. Bunce I should be afraid to have the boy taught such things. He’ll set the house on fire some day, will Master Jack, and burn himself and his little sister to death.’

‘But you see,’ said Lydia, ‘Mr. Ackroyd does keep to it. You didn’t think he’d persevere more than a week or two, and now it must be a good three months.’

‘Well, yes, it *does* look as if it was going to be different from the other things,’ Mrs. Poole admitted, with a grudging laugh. ‘Well, he always had a liking for reading books of that kind. Let’s hope he knows his own mind at last. But then he can’t never do anything in moderation, can’t Luke. He’s got an idea into his head that he’s going to invent a new kind of candle—if you ever heard such a thing! “Well,” says I to him, last night, when he come talking to me about it, “it’s what I call a come-down. Here a while ago you wasn’t content with nothing but setting the world upside down; now you’ll be satisfied if you can invent a new candle, and make money out of it. Well,” I says, “I’d be above candles, Luke!” My! you should have seen how angry he got! Who said he wanted to make money? Who’d

ever heard him mentioning money, he'd like to know? If people had low minds, that wasn't his fault! And then he went off grumbling to himself.'

'But,' ventured Lydia, with diffidence, 'I don't see there's any harm even if he did think of making money—do you, Mrs. Poole?'

'Not I, child! I only talked so just to teaze him. I do so like to teaze Luke; he puts on such airs. Let him make money of course, if he can; all the better for him. I'd a deal rather have him doing this than spending all his nights at that club in Westminster Bridge Road, talking nonsense, and worse. Why, he's ever so much better to live with now than he used to be. He really does talk sensible sometimes, and he isn't such a great baby about—about some things.'

Mrs. Poole smiled and held her tongue.

'And what's the last news from your sister?' was her next question.

'Oh, I had a letter yesterday,' Lydia replied, her face lighting up. 'It was all about the concert next Wednesday.'

'Well, well! She must be full of it, mustn't she, now? It must be a trying thing, to sing for the first time.'

'But it isn't so bad as if she had to sing alone, you know.'

'No, to be sure; but it must be bad enough even in a choir. Shan't you see her before the night?'

'No. And I shan't be able to speak to her on Wednesday, either. But the next day we shall have

all the evening together. She sent me my ticket. Look, I've brought it to show you.'

It was a ticket for a concert in one of the suburbs of London. Lydia kept it in an envelope, and handled it with care. Mrs. Poole, before taking it, wiped her hands on her apron, and then held the card between the tips of her thumb and middle finger.

'Will her name be on the programme?' she asked.

'No. They're called Mr. Redfern's choir, that's all.'

'Well, I'm sure it's very nice, and something to be proud of. And she still keeps her health?'

'She says she is very well indeed.'

'Mrs. Poole,' added Lydia, lowering her voice, 'you haven't said anything about it?'

'No, no, my dear; not I.'

'It's better not, I think. Of course it doesn't really matter, but still——'

'Bless you, I understand very well, Lydia. There's no occasion to talk about such things at all. I suppose Mary Bower knows?'

'Oh yes, I told Mary.'

'Wouldn't she have liked to go with you?'

'Yes, I'm sure she would. But I think I'd rather be alone. There'll be another concert before long, I dare say, and then she shall go. It's just this first time, you know.'

It was a cosy kitchen, and Lydia, once seated here, seemed to forget about the shopping of which she had spoken. Mrs. Poole's stream of talk was intimate and

soothing ; plenty of good sense, no scandal, and no lack of blitheness. But at length it was declared to be the children's bed time, and Lydia made this the signal for rising to take her leave.

‘Now do sit still!’ urged Mrs. Poole. ‘You’re such a restless body. I’ve got lots of things I want to talk about yet, if only I could think of them.’

‘I really must go,’ Lydia pleaded.

‘No, you mustn’t now, I shan’t be a minute getting these children off to bed, and then we’ll have just five minutes’ comfortable talk. Just sew me a new tape into that apron, there’s a good girl. You know where the cotton is—on the dresser up there.’

Lydia took up the task cheerfully, and by when it was completed the youngsters were stripped and night-gowned, and ready to say their reluctant good-night. Their mother carried them upstairs, one on her back and one in her arms—good strong mother.

And the chat was renewed, till the next event of the evening, supper, had to be prepared for. Lydia seemed to have given up the struggle ; she consented to stay for the meal without much pressing. When the table was laid Mrs. Poole went upstairs to her brother’s bedroom. On opening the door she was met with a very strong odour of chemical experimentalising. Despite the warmth of the season, there was a fire, with two or three singular pots boiling upon it. A table was covered with jars and phials, and test-tubes and retorts. Here Ackroyd was bending to explain something to a

sharp-eyed little lad, Jacky Bunce. Luke had allowed his beard to grow of late, and it improved his appearance; he looked more self-reliant than formerly. He was in his shirt-sleeves.

‘Now, Jacky,’ began Mrs. Poole, ‘what’ll your father say to you staying out till these hours? He’ll think you’re blowed up. Why, it’s half-past nine.’

‘All right, Jane,’ said Ackroyd. ‘Jack and I have had a deal of talk about the compounds of hydrogen.’

‘And if I was his mother, him and I would have a deal of talk about waistcoats,’ rejoined Mrs. Poole, shrewdly. ‘I declare, Luke, you ought to tie an apron over him, if he’s going to make that mess of himself.’

‘It’s an old waistcoat, Mrs. Poole,’ protested Jack. ‘I keep it on purpose.’

‘Oh, you do! Well, mind it don’t go through to your shirt, that’s all. Now run away home, Jacky, there’s a good boy.’

‘He shan’t be five minutes more,’ interposed Luke. ‘I’m coming down myself in five minutes.’

‘Well, supper’s waiting. And here’s Miss Trent here, too. Not that that’ll make you come any quicker; perhaps I’d better not have mentioned it.’

Jane pressed her lips together after speaking, and withdrew.

‘Don’t you like Miss Trent, Mr. Ackroyd?’ Jack inquired, when they were left alone. He was, as I have said, a sharp-eyed boy, and Luke could have given wonderful reports of his keenness of brain. It is always



thus. The father has faculties which never ripen in himself, and which, as likely as not, cause him a life's struggle and unrest; they come to maturity and efficiency in the son. What more pathetic, rightly considered, than the story of those fathers whose lives are but a preparation for the richer lives of their sons? Poor Bunce, fighting with his ignorance and his passions, unable to overcome either, obstinate in holding on to a half-truth, catching momentary glimpses of a far-away ideal—what did it all mean, but that his boy should stand where *he* had been thrown, should see light where *his* eyes had striven vainly against the fog! Perhaps there is compensation to the parent if he live to see the lad conquering; but what of those who fall into silence when all is still uncertain, when they recognise in their offspring an hereditary weakness and danger as often as a rare gleam of new promise? One would bow reverently and sadly by the graves of such men.

It was a happy thought of Ackroyd's to give the boy lessons in chemistry. To teach is often the surest way of learning. In explaining simple things, Luke often enough discovered for the first time his own ignorance. In very fact, the greater part of the past two years had been spent by him in making discoveries of that nature—long before he thought of new combinations of oleaginous matter. By degrees he had come to suspect that, as regarded the employment of his leisure hours, he was very decidedly on the wrong track. Curiously, for Ackroyd as well as for Bunce, there had arisen a

measure of evil from Walter Egremont's aspiring work. Luke, though not to such a violent degree as Bunce, was led to offer opposition to everything savouring of idealism—that is to say, of idealism as Egremont had presented it. He had heard but one of Walter's lectures, yet that was enough to realise for him the kind of thing which henceforth he disliked and distrusted. Egremont, it seemed to him, had sought to make working-men priggish and effeminate, whereas what they wanted was back-bone and consciousness of the hard facts of life. Ackroyd had never cared much for literature proper; his intellectual progress was henceforth to be in the direction of hostility to literature. When his various love difficulties ceased to absorb all his attention, he went back to his scientific books, and found that his appetite for such studies was keener than ever. At length he converted his bedroom into a laboratory, resolved to pursue certain investigations seriously. When his heart—or diaphragm, or whatever else it may be—left him at peace, his brain could work to sufficient purpose. And of late he had worked most vigorously. He ceased to trouble himself about politics, and religion, and social matters. His views thereon, he declared, had undergone no change whatever, but he had no time to talk at present.

But a question of Jack's waited for an answer.

'That's only my sister's fun,' Luke replied, with a smile. 'There's no reason why I shouldn't like her.'

‘I think she don’t look bad,’ Jack remarked, as if allowing himself to stray from chemistry to a matter of trivial interest. He added : ‘But she don’t come up to Miss Nancarrow. I like *her*; she’s the right kind of girl, don’t you think so?’

‘First-rate.’

‘I say, Mr. Ackroyd, why don’t you never come now and call for her, like you used to?’

‘Used to? When?’

‘Why, you know well enough. Not long ago.’

‘Oh, years ago!’

‘No, not more than a year ago.’

‘Yes, Jack; a year and a half.’

‘Well it didn’t seem so long. I say, why don’t you? I’ve only just thought of it.’

‘There’s no need to call. I see her sometimes, and that’s enough for friends, isn’t it?’

‘I believe you was going to marry Miss Nancarrow, wasn’t you?’

‘Hollo! Who told you such a thing as that?’

‘Nobody. I thought of it myself. It looks like it, when I think. I’m older now, you see, than I was then; I see more into things.’

Ackroyd laughed heartily.

‘It seems you do.’

‘Well but, tell me, Mr. Ackroyd.’

‘No, I shan’t. When you get a bit older still, you’ll know that men have no business to talk about such things. Understand that, Jack. Never get into the

way of talking about things that aren't your business ; there's been a deal of harm done by that.'

'Has there?'

Luke was silent. The boy continued :

'You're sure you *are* friends with Miss Nancarrow?'

'Of course I am, capital friends. Why, we were both of us on the Greenwich boat last Sunday, and we laughed and talked no end of time.'

But Luke was ready to leave the room. He appointed another evening when Jack should come, and the lad scampered off.

Leaving Ackroyd to go down and have supper with his sister and Lydia, and with Mr. Poole, who had just come home from a late job, let us go after Jack into Newport Street. As he reached the house, his father was just coming out.

'You're too late,' said the latter, with a shake of the head. 'Tell Mr. Ackroyd you must be back by nine. What about your lessons, eh?'

'Lessons!' exclaimed Jack, scornfully. 'Do them in half a crack before breakfast. Why, there's nothing but a bit of jography, and some kings, and three proportion sums, and a page of——'

'All right. Go to bed quietly. Nelly's asleep long ago. I shall be back in half an hour.'

Jack went very softly upstairs. In the one room which was still the entire home of his father and himself and his little sister, he found a lamp burning low. The child was in her small cot, sleeping peacefully. Jack

began to unbutton his acid-stained waistcoat, having seized a piece of bread and butter that lay waiting for him, when his thoughts intervened to suspend the operation of undressing. He left the room again, and looked at the door on the opposite side of the landing. He saw a light beneath it. He advanced and rapped softly.

‘Who’s that?’ was asked from within.

‘You ain’t in bed yet, Miss Nancarrow, are you?’ Jack asked, with the frankness of expression which became his age.

The door opened, and Totty appeared, able to receive visitors still with perfect propriety.

‘What is it, Jacky?’

The lad was munching his bread and butter.

‘You haven’t got a spoonful of that jam left, have you, Miss Nancarrow?’ he asked, with a mixture of confidence and shamefacedness.

Totty laughed.

‘I dare say I have. But this is a rare time to come asking for jam. Isn’t your father in?’

‘Gone out. Says he’ll be half an hour. Plenty of time, Miss Nancarrow.’

‘Come in then.’

Totty closed the door, and produced from her cupboard—a receptacle regarded with profound interest both by Nelly and the maturer Jack—a pot of black currant preserve. She spread some with a liberal hand on the lad’s bread, then watched him as he ate, her

enjoyment equalling his own. The bread finished, she offered a spoonful of jam pure and simple; it was swallowed with gusto.

‘I say, Miss Nancarrow,’ remarked Jack, ‘I don’t half-like going to a new house. I can’t see what father wants to move for; we’re well enough off here.’

‘Why don’t you want to go?’

‘Well, there’s a good many things. I shouldn’t mind so much, you know, if you was coming as well.’

Again she laughed.

‘That’s as much as to say, Jack, you’ll be sorry when there’s no jam. It isn’t *me*, not it!’

‘Don’t be so sure. I shall come and see you often enough, and not for jam, either. You’re always jolly with me. And I don’t see why you can’t come as well. Father ’ud like you to.’

Totty regarded him with a smile for an instant, then asked, carelessly:

‘How do you know that? As if it made any difference to your father!’

‘But he’s said he wished you was coming. He said so day before yesterday.’

‘Nonsense! Now get off to bed. He’ll be back, and we shall both get scolded.’

Jack drew to the door, but Totty recalled him.

‘What an idea, for your father to say he wished I was coming! Tell me how he said it.’

‘Why, it was about Nelly. We was talking and saying Nelly ’ud miss you. And father said, half to

himself like, "Nelly wouldn't be sorry if Miss Nancarrow 'ud come and be with her always, and I dare say somebody else wouldn't be sorry, either."

'Why, you silly boy, he meant you, of course.'

'Oh no, he didn't. Think I can't tell what he meant!'

'Run off to bed! I think I hear your father coming in.'

Jack made a rush, and in one minute and a half was under the bed-clothes.

The removal which Bunce was about to effect signified an improvement of circumstances. It was time for his luck to turn. Year after year he had found himself still at grip with poverty. The shadow of his evil domestic experiences lengthened as he drew further away, and it seemed as if he would never get beyond it. To a man of any native delicacy, the memory of bondage to a hateful woman clings like a long disease which impoverishes the blood; there is only one way of eradicating it, and that is with the aid of a strong, wholesome, new emotion. And at length Bunce began to feel that the past was really past; one sign of it was the better fortune which enabled him to earn more money. One of his children was dead, but the other two were growing in health of mind and body, and he could clothe them better, could look forward to their future, at last, without that sinking of the heart which at times had made him pause by night on one of the river bridges and long for a moment's madness that he might plunge and have done with everything. Few



men had come out of darkness into the light of a sober working-day with less help than he had had. It was his nature to keep silence on his difficulties. He did not much care to hold continuous friendship with any man, for, like all who have the habit of talking to themselves, he was conscious that his companionship lacked attraction. Moreover—a thing which superficial observers do not realise—like all who are most genuinely at odds with the world, the first head of his quarrel was with himself. He was only too well aware of his own defects and errors. He felt himself to be unamiable, often gross of understanding, always ready to fall into a blunder which other men would avoid. He had stood in his own way as often as he had been balked by others, perhaps oftener.

Now he was going to risk a step forward, was going to leave his single room lodging and take two rooms in a brighter street some distance away. They would be vacant for him a fortnight hence, and he had money enough to buy furniture. Yet he did not look forward to the change as cheerfully as might have been expected.

For one reason, and for one only, the old abode was preferable to him; it was a reason of such weight that it cost him no little exertion of common sense to put it aside. At the same time, it *had* to be put aside, and most resolutely, for, whenever it occupied his mind, he soon found himself uttering contemptuous remarks upon his own thick-headed folly. He would sometimes blurt out such words as ‘fool—idiot—blockhead,’ as he

walked along the street, astonishing passers-by who could not be supposed to know that the speaker was applying these epithets to himself.

On Sunday evening, a day or two after the conversation just reported between Jack and Totty, Bunce took his children to Battersea Park. When there, he did not walk about among the people, but sought a retired piece of lawn and sat down to enjoy a pipe. Nelly had brought a doll with her, and found delectable occupation in explaining to it all the various objects which might reasonably excite its curiosity in such a place. Jack talked with his father of chemistry, of his school teachers, of what he would be when he was a man. Their conversation was interrupted by Nelly's exclaiming:

‘See, there’s Miss Nancarrow!’

Totty was coming over the grass at a little distance, between two companions, girls dressed with an emphasis of Sunday elegance which made her look rather brown and plain by contrast. Totty never cared to spend much on clothes, a singular feature of her character. When the three were passing at a distance of twenty yards, Nelly cried out with shrill voice:

‘Miss Nancarrow!’

‘Hush, child!’ said her father, more annoyed than seemed necessary. ‘Don’t scream at people in that way.’

Nelly was abashed, but her cry had caught Totty’s

ear. The latter nodded, laughed, and went on with her friends.

‘I say, father,’ Jack began, ‘do you know what I think?’

‘What, boy?’

‘Why, I think if you asked Miss Nancarrow to come and take a room in the new house, she would.’

‘Why on earth should I ask her to do such a thing?’ inquired Bunce, laying down his pipe on the grass; it had gone out since Totty’s passing. He looked at his son with bent brows, and rather fiercely.

‘Well, I know I’d like her to, and so would Nelly. I can get on with Miss Nancarrow, ’cause she’s got so much sense. I don’t think much of other women.’

Bunce grubbed up roots of grass with his hard, blunt fingers. Then he took up his pipe again and turned the stem about between his teeth. And the while he cast glances at Jack, side glances, half savage.

‘What makes you think she’d come?’ he inquired at length, with a blundering attempt at indifference of tone.

‘I talked to her about it the other night.’

‘Oh, you did, did you? And what business had you to talk about such things, I’d like to know?’

‘I don’t see no harm. I told her we’d all be glad if she’d come.’

‘What the confusion! And who told you to say any such thing?’

Jack was amazed at the outburst of wrath he had provoked.

‘Well, father,’ he muttered, ‘I’ve heard you say yourself that you’d be glad if she was coming.’

‘Then I’ll thank you not to repeat what I say. Leave Miss Nancarrow alone. If I find you’ve talked to her in that way again, you and me ’ll quarrel, Jack.’

The boy fell into a fit of sulks, and drew to a little distance, where he lay flat, beating the earth vigorously with a stick.

Then it strangely happened that someone came round the bushes, in the shadow of which the three were reposing, and that it was no other than Miss Nancarrow, this time unaccompanied. Bunce did not notice her till she stood before him, then he jumped to his feet.

‘Don’t disturb yourself, Mr. Bunce,’ said Totty, with her usual self-command. ‘I’m only going to have a talk with Nelly, that’s all.’

She sat down on the grass by the little one, and began a grave dialogue on the subject of certain ailments from which the doll had recently recovered.

It had been nursed through measles—Nelly having had them not long ago—and its face still showed signs of the disease.

Jack was not disposed to talk. His discretion had been impugned, and at Jack’s age one feels anything of that kind shrewdly. Letting his eyes wander about the portion of park that lay before them, he saw at a

little distance the nucleus of a religious meeting. At any other time he would have scorned to pay attention to such a phenomenon; at present he was glad of any opportunity of asserting his independence. He knew his father ridiculed prayer-meetings, consequently he rose and began to walk in the direction of the group of people.

‘Where are you going, Jack?’ cried Bunce.

‘Only for a walk. I’ll come back.’

His father acquiesced. Totty suspended her talk and gazed after him for a moment. Then she turned to Bunce.

‘So you’ve found rooms, Mr. Bunce?’ she said, with a piece of sorrel between her lips.

‘Yes, I’ve got two that’ll suit us, I think.’

He mentioned where they were, and made a few remarks about them.

‘If there’s anything I can do to help you,’ said Totty, looking at Jack’s distant figure, ‘you’ll tell me, I know. There might be some sewing. I’ve got plenty of time. Window blinds, and those things.’

‘Well, I’ve made arrangements about all that with the landlady,’ Bunce replied, in some embarrassment. ‘I thank you very much, Miss Nancarrow, all the same.’

‘That’s too bad of you. You knew very well I’d have been glad to help. Tell your father he’s very soon forgetting his old friends, Nelly.’

She drew the child to her as she spoke, and kissed her cheek.

‘You know very well I shan’t do that, Miss Nancarrow,’ said Bunce, glancing at her. ‘Whoever else, I’m not likely to forget you.’

‘I’m not so sure of that. Are you, Nelly?’

He said nothing. Totty let her eyes catch a glimpse of his face. He was looking down, and again grubbing up grass.

‘I shall be very sorry if you don’t come and see the children sometimes,’ he mumbled. ‘Or at all events, I hope they can come and see you.’

‘Shall you still work at the same shop?’ Totty asked, paying no attention to the last remark.

‘Yes, for a bit at all events.’

‘Why don’t you start a shop of your own, Mr. Bunce?’ she next inquired, as if a happy idea had struck her.

‘I shouldn’t mind doing that,’ he answered, with a hard laugh. ‘But shops can’t be had for the wishing.’

‘You don’t need a big one. Now like that shop in Duke Street, you know. What’s the rent of a place like that?’

‘I’m sure I don’t know. I suppose it goes with the house.’

‘Then what’s the rent of the house likely to be? You could let all you didn’t want, you know, and that ’ud almost pay the rent, I should think.’

He laughed again.

‘What’s the good of talking about it? Why, there’s a little locksmith’s and ironmonger’s shop to

let in that street just off the far end of Lambeth Walk. They're selling off now; I'm going to buy a few things to-morrow. But what's the good of thinking about it?'

'I don't know. What's the rent?'

'Not more than forty pounds, house and all, I dare say. A mate of mine was talking about it. He said he wished he'd a couple of hundred pounds to take it and start. The man's dead, and his wife wanted to sell the business, but she can't get an offer.'

The meeting which Jack was attending had begun to sing a hymn. The voices, harmonised by distance, sounded pleasantly.

'I like that hymn-tune, Mr. Bunce,' said Totty, 'don't you?'

'I don't think much about hymns, Miss Nancarrow.'

'Well, you might say you like it.'

'I do, to tell the truth—so long as I can't hear the words.'

'I don't care nothing about the words, either. So we agree about something, at all events.'

'I don't think we've differed about many things, have we?'

She looked at him frankly, and smiled. Then she said:

'Oh, you used to be a bit afraid of me, I know. Shall I tell you what it was made us real friends? It was when you burnt your hand, and I did it up for you.'



Bunce now returned her look, and his swarthy cheeks reddened. His eyes fell again.

‘You behaved very kindly,’ he said in a half-ashamed way. ‘I don’t forget, and I’m not likely ever to. And I shan’t forget all you’ve done for the children, either. I don’t think there’s any one living I’ve more to thank for than you.’

‘The idea!’

‘Well, it’s true.’

‘But look here, Mr. Bunce. About that shop. Suppose you had two hundred and fifty pounds; could you make a start, do you think?’

‘I rather suppose I could. And where’s two hundred and fifty pound to come from, Miss Nancarrow?’

‘I’ll lend it you, if you like.’

He gazed at her with so strange a face that Totty broke into hearty laughter. Bunce joined, appreciating the joke.

‘I mean it, Mr. Bunce. I’ve got two hundred and fifty pounds—at all events I can have, whenever I like.’

He gazed again, wondering at her tone.

‘Now I see you don’t believe me, so I shall have to explain.’

She told him the story of her legacy, only forbearing to speak of the condition attached to it.

‘Will you let me lend it you, Mr. Bunce?’

‘No, I’m sure I shan’t, Miss Nancarrow. You’ll have plenty of use for that yourself.’

‘Look here, Nelly!’ The child was listening to this remarkable dialogue, and trying to understand. ‘Tell your father he’s to do just what I want. If he doesn’t, I’ll never speak again neither to you nor Jacky. Now, I mean it.’

‘Please, father,’ said Nelly, ‘do what Miss Nancarrow wants.’

Bunce kept his face half averted. He was at a dire pass.

‘Well, Mr. Bunce?’

‘That’s all nonsense!’ he exclaimed. ‘How can I tell that I should ever be able to pay you back?’

‘So you won’t?’

‘Of course I can’t. It’s just like you to offer, but of course I can’t.’

‘Very well, I can’t help it.’ She lowered her voice. ‘I forgot to tell you that I can’t get the money till I’m married. It doesn’t matter, I’ve offered it.’

Bunce stared at her.

‘Good-bye, Nelly,’ Totty went on. ‘I can’t be friends with you after this. Your father’s told me to go about my business.’

‘No, he hasn’t,’ protested the child, dolorously. ‘You haven’t, have you, father?’

‘Yes, he has. It doesn’t matter, I’m off.’

She jumped up. Bunce sprang to his feet at the same time, and caught her up in a moment. She turned, looked at him, reddened, laughed.

‘Why did you say anything about that money?’ he

began, able to speak without restraint at length. 'If I hadn't known about that!'

'I don't see what the money's got to do with it.'

'I do. Look, I should have felt like making a fool of myself—a man of my age and with two children—but I do believe when I'd got into those new rooms I couldn't have helped some day asking you if—well, I can't say it. I'm ashamed of myself, that's the truth.'

'And what does that matter, Mr. Bunce, so long as I'm not ashamed of you?'

'When you might do so well? A man like me—and the children?'

'How you talk! Don't you think I'm fond of the children?'

'Come and sit down again and talk a bit.'

'No. Will you have the money, Mr. Bunce, or won't you?'

'I'd very much rather have you without it, Totty, and that's the honest truth.'

'Yes, but you can't, you see. Now, you'll have a rare tale to tell of me some day, when you're tired of me. And it's all come of your changing your lodgings.'

'I know.'

'No, you don't know. Come and sit down, and I'll tell you.'

Totty went back, and fondled Nelly against her side, and explained why the threatened change of abode had made her act with such independence—characteristic to the end.

## CHAPTER IX.

## THREE LETTERS.

*Walter Egremont to Mrs. Ormonde.*

‘WERE I to spend the rest of my natural life in this country—which assuredly I have no intention of doing—I think I should never settle down to an hour’s indulgence of those tastes which were born in me, and which, in spite of all neglect, are in fact as strong as ever. I cannot read the books I wish to read; I cannot even think the thoughts I wish to think. As I have told you, the volumes I brought out with me lay in their packing-cases for more than six months after my arrival, and for all the use I have made of them in this second six months they might be still there. The shelves in the room which I call my library are furnished, but I dare not look how much dust they have accumulated.

‘I read scarcely anything but newspapers—ye gods! it is I who write the words! Newspapers at morning, newspapers at night. Yes, one exception; I have spent a good deal of time of late over Walt Whitman (you know him, of course, by name, though I dare say you have never looked into his works), and I expect

that I shall spend a good deal more ; I suspect, indeed, that he will in the end come to mean much to me. But I cannot write of him yet ; I am struggling with him, struggling with myself as regards him ; in a month or so I shall have more to say. It is perfectly true, then, that till quite recently I have read but newspapers. The people about me scarcely by any chance read anything else, and the influence of surroundings has from the first been very strong upon me. You have complained frequently that I say nothing to you about my *self* ; it is one of the signs of my condition that with difficulty I think of that self, and to pen words about it has been quite impossible. I long constantly for the old world and the old moods, but I cannot imagine myself back into them. I would give anything to lock my door at night, and take down my Euripides ; if I get as far as the shelf, my hand drops.

‘I begin to see a meaning in this phase of my life. I have been learning something about the latter end of the nineteenth century, its civilisation, its possibilities, and the subject has a keen interest for me. Is it new, then ? you will ask. To tell you the truth, I knew nothing whatever about it until I came and began to work in America. I am in the mood for frankness, and I won’t spare myself. All my so-called study of modern life in former days was the merest diletantism, mere conceit and boyish pedantry. I travelled, and the fact that wherever I went I took a small classical library with me was symbolical of my state of mind.

I saw everything through old-world spectacles. Even in America I could not get rid of my pedantry, as you will recognise clearly enough if you look back to the letters I wrote you at that time. I came then with theories in my head of what American civilisation must be, and everything that I saw I made fit in with my preconceptions. This time I came with my mind a blank. I was ill, and had not a theory left in me on any subject in the universe. For the first time in my life I was suffering all that a man can suffer; when the Atlantic roared about me, I scarcely cared whether it engulfed me or not. Getting back my health, I began to see with new eyes, and have since been looking my hardest. And I have still not a theory on any subject in the universe.

‘In fact, I believe that for me the day of theories has gone by. I note phenomena, and muse about them, and not a few interest me extremely. The interest is enough. I am not a practical man; I am not a philosopher. I may, indeed, have a good deal of the poet’s mind, but the poet’s faculty is denied to me. It only remains to me to study the word in its relations to my personality, that I may henceforth avoid the absurdities to which I have such a deplorable leaning.

‘Do you know what I ought to have been?—A schoolmaster. That is to say, if I wished to do any work of direct good to my fellows in the world. I could have taught boys well, better than I shall ever do anything else. I could not only have taught them

—the “gerund-grinding” of Thomas Carlyle—but could have inspired them with love of learning, at all events such as were capable of being so inspired. My class of working men in Lambeth exercised this faculty to some extent. When I was teaching them English Literature, I was doing, as far as it went, good and sound work. When I drifted into “Thoughts for the Present”—Heaven forgive me!—I made an ass of myself, that’s the long and short of it. My ears tingle as I remember those evenings.

‘I am infinitely more human than I was; I can even laugh heartily at American humour, and that I take to be a sign of health. Health is what I have gained. The devotion of eight or ten hours a day to the work of the factory has been the best medicine anyone could have prescribed to me. It was you who prescribed it, and it was your crowning act of kindness to me, dear Mrs. Ormonde. It is possible that I have grown coarser; indeed, I know that I associate on terms of equality and friendliness with men from whom I should formerly have shrunk. I can get angry, and stand on my rights, and bluster if need be, and on the whole I think I am no worse for that. My ear is not offended if I hear myself called “boss”; why should it be? it is a word as well as another. Nay, I have even felt something like excitement when listening to political speeches, in which frequent mention was made of “the great State of Pennsylvania.” Well, it *is* a great State, or the phrase has no meaning in any application.



Will not this early life of the New World some day be studied with reverence and enthusiasm? I try to see things as they are.

‘Social problems are here in plenty. Indeed, it looks very much as if America would sooner have reached an acute stage of social conflict than the old countries; naturally, as it is the refuge of those who abandon the old world in disgust. American equality is a mere phrase; there is as much brutal injustice here as elsewhere. But I can no longer rave on the subject; the injustice is a *fact*, and only other facts will replace it; I concern myself only with facts. And the great fact of all is the contemptibleness of average humanity. I will submit for your reverent consideration the name of a great American philanthropist—Cornelius Vanderbilt. Personally he was a disgusting brute; ignorant, base, a boor in his manners, a black-guard in his language; he had little if any natural affection, and to those who offended him he was a relentless barbarian. Yet the man was a great philanthropist, and became so by the piling up of millions of dollars. Of course he did that for his own vulgar satisfaction, though personally he could not use the money when he had it; no matter, he has aided civilisation enormously. He as good as created the steamship industry in America; he reorganised the railway system with admirable results; by adding so much to the circulating capital of the country, he provided well-paid employment for unnumbered men. Thousands

of homes should bless the name of Vanderbilt—and what is the state of a world in which such a man can do such good by such means? Well, I have nothing to say to it. It is merely part of the tremendous present, which interests me.

‘And I once stood up in my pulpit, and with mild assurance addressed myself to the task of improving the world! Do not make fun of me when we meet again, dear friend; I am too bitterly ashamed of myself.

‘It seems a long time since you told me anything of Thyra. I do not like to receive a letter from you in which there is no mention of her name. Does she still find a resource in her music? Are you still kind to her? Yes, kind I know you are, but are you gentle and affectionate, doing your utmost to make her forget that she is alone? You do not see her very frequently, I fear. I beg you to write to her often, the helpful letters you can write to those whom you love. She can repay you for all trouble with one look of gratitude.’

*(Three months later.)*

‘I am sending you Whitman’s “Leaves of Grass.” I see from your last letter that you have not yet got the book, and have it you must. It is idle to say that you cannot take up new things, that you doubt whether he has any significance for *you*, and so on. You have heart and brain, therefore his significance for you will be profound.

‘I would not write much about him hitherto; for I dreaded the smile on your face at a new enthusiasm. I wished, too, to test this influence upon myself thoroughly; I assure you that it is easier for me now to be sceptical than to open my heart generously to any one who in our day declares himself a message-bringer to mankind. You know how cautiously I have proceeded with this American *vates*. At first I found so much to repel me, yet from the first also I was conscious of a new music, and then the clamour of the vulgar against the man was quite enough to oblige me to give him careful attention. If one goes on the assumption that the ill word of the mob is equivalent to high praise, one will not, as a rule, be far wrong, in matters of literature. I have studied Whitman, enjoyed him, felt his force and his value. And, speaking with all seriousness, I believe that he has helped me, and will help me, inestimably, in my endeavour to become a sound and mature man.

‘For in him I have met with one who is, first and foremost, a man, a large, healthy, simple, powerful, full-developed man. Read his poem called “A Song of Joys”—what glorious energy of delight, what boundless sympathy, what *sense*, what *spirit*! He knows the truth of the life that is in all things. From joy in a railway train—“the laughing locomotive! To push with resistless way and speed off in the distance”—to joy in fields and hillsides, joy in “the dropping of rain-drops in a song,” joy in the fighter’s strength, joy in

the life of the fisherman, in every form of active being  
—aye, and

Joys of the free and lonesome heart, the tender, gloomy heart,  
Joys of the solitary work, the spirit bow'd yet proud, the suffering  
and the struggle ;  
The agonistic throes, the ecstasies, joys of the solemn musings day  
or night ;  
Joys of the thought of Death, the great spheres Time and Space !

What would not I give to know the completeness of manhood implied in all that ? Such an ideal of course is not a new-created thing for me, but I never *felt* it as in Whitman's work. It is so foreign to my own habits of thought. I have always been so narrow, in a sense so provincial. And indeed I doubt whether Whitman would have appealed to me as he now does had I read him for the first time in England and under the old conditions. These fifteen months of practical business life in America have swept my brain of much that was mere prejudice, even when I thought it worship. I was a pedantic starveling ; now, at all events, I *see* the world about me, and all the goodness of it. Then I am far healthier in body than I was, which goes for much. It would be no hardship to me to take an axe and go off to labour on the Pacific coast ; nay, a year so spent would do me a vast amount of good.

‘ I wonder whether you have read any of the twaddle that is written about Whitman's grossness, his materialism, and so forth ? If so, read his poems now, and tell me how they impress you. Is he not *all* spirit,

rightly understood? For to him the body with its energies is but manifestation of that something invisible which we call human soul. And so pure is the soul in him, so mighty, so tender, so infinitely sympathetic, that it may stand for Humanity itself. I am often moved profoundly by his words. He makes me feel that I am a very part of the universe, and that in health I can deny kinship with nothing that exists. I believe that he for the first time has spoken with the very voice of Nature; forests and seas sing to us through him, and through him the healthy, unconscious man, "the average man," utters what before he had no voice to tell of, his secret aspirations, his mute love and praise.

'Look you! I write a sort of essay, and in doing so prove that I am myself still. Were it not that I have mercy on you, I could preach on even as I used to do to my class in Lambeth. Ha, if I had known Whitman then! I believe that by persuading those men to read him, and helping them to understand him, I should really have done an honest day's work. There were some who could have relished his meaning, and whose lives he would have helped. For there it is; Whitman helps one; he is a tonic beyond all to be found in the druggist's shop. I imagine that to live with the man himself for a few days would be the best thing that could befall an invalid; surely vital force would come out of him.

'He makes one ashamed to groan at anything. What-

ever comes to us is in the order of things, and the sound man accepts it as his lot. Yes, even Death—of which he says noble things. The old melodious weeping of the poets—Moschus over his mallows, and Catullus with his “*Soles occidere et redire possunt*”—Whitman has no touch of that. Noble grief there is in him, and noble melancholy can come upon him, but acquiescence is his last word. He holds that all is good, because it exists, for everything plays its part in the scheme of nature. When his day comes, he will die, as the greatest have done before him, and there will be no puny repining at the order of things.

‘Has he then made me a thorough-going optimist? Scarcely, for the willow cannot become the oak. Your old name for me was “The Idealist,” and I suppose in a measure I deserved it; I know I did in the most foolish sense of the word. And in my idealism was of course implied a good deal of optimism. But shall I tell you what was there in a yet larger measure? That which is termed self-conceit. An enemy speaking of me now—Dalmaine for example, if he chose to tell the truth—would say that a business-life in America has taken a great deal of the humbug out of me. I shall always be rather a weak mortal, shall always be marked by that blend of pessimism and optimism which necessarily marks the man to whom, in his heart, the beautiful is of supreme import, shall always be prone to accesses of morbid feeling, and in them, I dare say, find after all my highest pleasure. Nay, it is certain that

Moschus and Catullus will always be more loved by me than Whitman. For all this, I am not what I was, and I am a completer man than I was. I shall remain here yet nine months, and who can say what further change may go on in me ?

‘ Now to another subject. It gladdens me to hear what you say of Thyrza, that she seems both well and happy. I envy you the delight of hearing her sing. It is a beautiful thing that in this way she has found expression for that poetry which I always read in her face. By-the-by, does she still meet her sister away from the place where she lives ? Is that still necessary ? However, all these details are in your judgment. The great thing is that she is happy in her life, that she has found a great interest.

‘ I wish to know—I beg you to answer me—whether she has ever spoken of me. When I used to press you to speak on this subject, you always ignored that part of my letter. Need you still do so ? Will you not tell me whether she has asked about me, has spoken in any way of me ? To be sure, you must betray no confidences ; yet perhaps it will not be doing so.

‘ Read Whitman ; try to sympathise with me as I now am. You know that I am anything but low-spirited, yet in very truth I have no single companion here to whom I can speak of intimate things, and, except on business, I write absolutely to no one in England save to you. And intellectual sympathy I do need ;



I scarcely think I could live on through my life without it.

‘Another thing, and the last. You have never once spoken of Miss Newthorpe, nor have I, in all this long time. I pray you tell me something of her. It is very likely that she’s married—to whom, now? Her husband should be an interesting man, one I should like some day to know. Or is she another example of the unaccountable things women will do in marriage. Pray Heaven not!’

*(Eight months after the last.)*

‘I have just been reading a leader in the “New York Herald” wherein there is mention of Dalmaine’s factory bill. Dalmaine is spoken of with extreme respect: his measure is one of those which “largely testify to the practical wisdom and beneficence of the spirit which prevails in British legislation.” This kind of thing it is, says the writer, which keeps England in such freedom from the social disturbance so rife on the continent of Europe, and from which America has so much to fear. Seriously, this is all very right and just: Dalmaine is deserving well of his country. But the amazing fact is that *such* a man comes forward to perform such services. However, it is only the Vanderbilt business over again. These men are the practical philanthropists, and to sneer at them is very much the same as to speak contemptuously of the rain-shower which aids the growth of the corn.

‘I have written very short letters lately. Business has claimed me night and day. We have had sundry difficulties of late, which you certainly would not thank me for explaining, and I am only just beginning to feel that if I take my due sleep at night I am doing nothing wrong. For months I have been the man of business, pure and simple. I have exerted myself to over-reach people, and have fumed because others all but succeeded in over-reaching me. I have lived the life of a cunning and laborious animal. Well, I have my profit of it in several ways, but I think I have had about enough of it for the present.

‘I shall be in England in a month.

‘Whether I shall remain there long, is uncertain. But at all events I shall not be back here again for some time. One of our London men is coming to take my place. Ye gods! I have compliments from my fellows in the firm. It makes me feel that I must have sunk low.

‘And now to the subject which I really took up my pen to write about. I am very glad that you speak of letting Lydia visit her sister before long. I remember well how much they are to each other. It has been no less than heroism in Thyrza to submit to practical separation for so long a time, at your mere bidding, without explanation asked or given.

‘Shall you speak of me to Thyrza before my return? No, I suppose you will take no such responsibility. I don’t know what your mind is now on this matter, but

in any case you have performed your part right generously and nobly, and it is a very pleasant thought to me that through her life Thyrza will regard you as her dearest friend, the one to whom she owes most. It will be a never failing source of sympathy between her and myself.

‘Do you think she *expects* my coming before long? Does such expectation explain her constant cheerfulness?—otherwise, I do not quite understand her, and have long felt it a difficulty. I put absolute faith in all you tell me of her—need I say that? But, if indeed she looks forward to seeing me, in what manner has she conceived that hope? I confess I did not think that her nature was of the kind which can derive sufficient support from hope alone, hope which comes of mere wish. It would be so very different if any word had even passed between us which her memory could store up as encouragement. In that case she would hope on for years, her own fidelity making it impossible for her to suspect me of unfaithfulness. That, I believe, *is* in her character. You remember that, in my raving, I accused myself to you and said that I was conscious of having allowed her to read my thoughts. I cannot now be sure whether that was true or not; I heartily wish I could. Still, I am sure that I did not purposely lead her to think I was in love with her. And, as things turned out, nothing subsequently happened to give her that idea; at all events, nothing I ever knew of. True, I made confession to Grail, but he would not have

spoken of it to Thyrza, even if he had had opportunity, which you are convinced he has not. And you say it is equally certain that Lydia Trent would not help her to such knowledge. We can only conclude that the fact of your adopting her, as it were, makes her hope that she is being prepared for something in the future.

‘Well, I know it is not impossible that she has forgotten me, in the lover’s sense. I am not so conceited as to believe that a girl who has once conceived a liking for me must necessarily hold me in her heart for ever. There would be nothing strange, certainly nothing unworthy, in her putting away all thought of one who, for anything she knew, had never dreamed of loving her. I wonder what your own belief is? But do not write about this. I shall see you very soon. I mean to be in England just before the appointed day, and to come to you at once.

‘The future puzzles me a little at times, and yet after all it will be very simple. When a man marries the duties of life are suddenly made very plain. Formerly it was my incessant question: What ought I to do with myself, with my time, with my money? And of course, being what I am and living in our age, I drove on the rocks of philanthropic enterprise. No more risk of that. The one task before me is to make a woman as happy as by all endeavour I may; to think of nothing in this world until her heart is at rest; to sacrifice everything to her advancement; and therein, easily enough, to find my own happiness. The circum-

stances of my marriage will give me more opportunity of making this aim predominant than men usually have. Thyrza will need to be taught much, and will be eager to learn. I think I shall take a house not far from London, and live there quietly for two or three years. It has occurred to me to bring her here, but I had rather she developed her intellectual life in England. It is scarcely probable that, after once quitting it, I shall return to this humdrum business; I have vast arrears to make up in all my natural pursuits, and with Thyrza to bear me company in the fields, I am not very likely to go back of my own will to a factory. So that, after all, the future is clear enough; more peaceful and more fruitful than ever the past was. You will often come to us, will you not? It will be a joy to open our door to you, and to seat you at our table. And in the evenings Thyrza shall sing to us.

‘By-the-by, suppose, when I offer myself to her, she refuses to marry me!—Is it possible? Is it impossible? Of course, if her contentment has nothing to do with hope of seeing me again, then my appearance will only surprise and alarm and trouble her.

‘Things must rest till I see you. I will telegraph from New York when I am starting for Europe. I shall be glad to see England again, glad to leave trade behind me, thrice glad to hold your hand.’

## CHAPTER X.

## THYRZA WAITS.

‘I CAN’T promise, Mrs. Emerson, that my sister will come down and have tea with you. Please don’t make any preparations; it’s only perhaps.’

Thyrza had looked into the sitting-room to say this late in the evening. Harold Emerson was out.

‘Oh, but she must!’ Clara pleaded. ‘Why not, dear? Won’t you let me see her at all then?’

Thyrza closed the door, which she had been holding open, and advanced into the room. She wore a dress of light hue, and had some flowers in her girdle. The past year had added a trifle to her stature; it could not add to her natural grace, but her manner of entering showed that diffidence had been overcome by habit. There was very little now to distinguish her from the young lady who had always walked on carpets.

‘You won’t mind if I ask you to come up to my room instead, Mrs. Emerson?’ she said, standing before the sofa on which Clara sat sewing. ‘I don’t know that it will be necessary, but, if it should be——’

‘Oh, I will gladly come. It’s only that I didn’t like to think of not making her acquaintance at all.’

‘There’s no reason why I shouldn’t explain it to you,’ Thyrza said, holding her hands together. ‘My sister has never been with any except working people, and it is quite natural that she should feel a little afraid of meeting strangers. I’m sure she needn’t be ; but of course I must do what she wishes.’

‘But, my dear, surely nobody in the world could be afraid of *us* ! And, as you say, I feel certain that *your* sister needn’t be afraid of anyone. I’ll come up and see her, and we’ll talk a little, and she’ll get used to me.’

‘Yes. I am so glad she is coming !’

‘I’m sure you are. And how well you look to-night, dear ! It’s so seldom you have any colour in your cheeks. There now ! If I was another sort of person, you’d go away thinking I’d said that on purpose to hurt you.’

‘How could I ?’ Thyrza uttered in surprise. ‘What sort of people would have that thought ?’

‘Oh, very many that I know.’

‘Surely not, Mrs. Emerson ! But it’s quite true ; my cheeks feel a little hot to-night. They generally do when I’ve been making myself very happy about anything.’

‘But you’re always so happy.’

‘Not more than you are,’ Thyrza replied, laughing.

‘Well, I think you show it more. When I’m



happiest, I sit very quiet, and look very dull. Now you sing, and your eyes get so bright and large, you don't know how large your eyes look sometimes.'

Thyrza laughed and shook her head.

'I sing too much,' she said. 'If I don't mind I shall be hurting my voice. But it's late; I must be off to bed. And I know I shan't sleep all night. To tell the truth, it isn't often I sleep more than three or four hours. Good-night, Mrs. Emerson!'

'Good-night, happy girl!'

She went away, laughing in pure, liquid notes. Her light step could not be heard as she ran up the stairs.

It wanted but a week of the day to which Thyrza's life had pointed for two years. That day of the month had stood long since marked upon her calendar; and now the long months had annihilated themselves; it wanted but seven days.

External changes of some importance had come to her of late. Since her admission to Mr. Redfern's choir she no longer wrought with her needle. More than that, every other day there came a lady who read with her and taught her. The time of weary toil without assistance was over. She had never been able to seek help of Mrs. Emerson; it was repugnant to her to speak of what she was doing in secret. To tell of her efforts would have seemed to Thyrza like half revealing her motives, so closely connected in her own mind were the endeavour and its hope. Mrs.

Ormonde had known, but hitherto had offered no direct assistance.

To the latter Thyrza's relation was a strange one. As her mind matured, as her dreaming gave way more frequently to conscious reflection, she often asked herself how, knowing Mrs. Ormonde's thoughts, she could accept from her so much and repay her with such sincere affection. Told to her of another, she could with difficulty have believed it. Yet the simple truth remained that she had never shrunk from Mrs. Ormonde's offers of kindness, had never felt humiliated in receiving anything at her hands. This could not have been but for the sincerity of affection on Mrs. Ormonde's side. A dialogue such as that which Thyrza had overheard at Eastbourne would have inspired hatred in a nature less pure than hers. She had wondered, had at times thought that Mrs. Ormonde misjudged her; yet such was the simple candour of her mind that, instead of fostering evil, that secret knowledge had wrought upon her in the most beneficial way. 'She thinks that I am no fit wife for him; but that isn't all. She thinks of me, too, and believes that he could not make me happy. Though speaking in private, she did not say a word that could truly offend me. I know her to be good. I remember what she was by my bedside when I was ill; and I have seen numberless things that prove how impossible it is for her to deceive anyone who puts trust in her.' And from that Thyrza derived both comfort and guidance. 'I will not fear her. Perhaps

she has acted in the wisest and kindest way. To him who loves me two years will be nothing ; and cannot *I* use the time to prove to her that I am worthy to be his wife? If his love is still the same—how can it not be?—and my worthiness is put beyond doubt, she can have no further reason for opposing our marriage ; nay, she will be glad in my happiness and in his. She shall see that I can bear trial, that I can work quietly and perseveringly, above all that I am faithful.’

And time made the affection between them stronger. Thyrza believed that Mrs. Ormonde’s opposition to the marriage was weakening ; when at length, as the time drew to an end, menial work was put aside and she was encouraged to spend her days in improving her mind, it seemed to her a declaration that she was found fit for a higher standing than that to which she was born. The joy which filled her became almost too great to bear. She no longer strove to conceal it in Mrs. Ormonde’s presence. There was a touching little scene between them on the afternoon before the concert at which Thyrza was to sing for the first time. Mrs. Ormonde came to Thyrza’s room unannounced ; the latter was laying out the dress she was to wear in the evening—a simple white dress, but far more beautiful than any she had ever put on. Seeing her friend enter, she turned, looked in her face, and burst into tears. When she could utter words, they were a passionate expression of gratitude. Mrs. Ormonde believed in that moment that her two years’ anxiety had found its end.

Very shortly after came the permission for Lydia to visit her. It was new assurance that Mrs. Ormonde was reconciled to what she had tried to prevent. A week, and there would come another visitor, one who was more to her even than her sister.

In looking back, the time seemed very brief, for, whatever change had been made in her, the love which was her life's life had known no shadow of change. Had it perhaps strengthened? It was hard to believe that she could love more than in that day of her darkest misery, when it had seemed that she must die of longing for him to whom she had given her soul. Yet she was stronger now, her life was richer in a multitude of ways, and every gain she had achieved paid tribute to her life's motive. Her singing she valued most as a way of uttering the emotion she must not speak of to anyone; in music she could ease herself of passion, yet fear no surprisal of her secret. Nothing was a joy save in reference to that one end that was before her. If she felt happy in a piece of knowledge attained, it was because she would so soon speak of it to him, and hear him praise her for it. Everything and all people about her seemed to conspire for her happiness. Even the bodily pain which had often tried her so was no longer troublesome, or very seldom indeed. Mrs. Emerson might well call her 'happy girl.'

In him she could imagine no change. His face was as present to her as if she had seen him an hour ago, and she never asked herself whether two years would

have made any alteration even in his appearance. His voice was the voice in which he had spoken to Mrs. Ormonde, when he uttered the golden words that said he loved her. He would speak now in the same way, with those inflections which she knew so well, dearer music than any she had learnt or could learn. In the beginning she had known a few fears; time then was so long—so long before her; but what had she to do with fear now? Was he not Walter Egremont, the man of all men—the good, wise, steadfast? She had heard much praise of him in the old days, but never praise enough. No one knew him well enough; no one the half as well as she did. Should she not know him who dwelt in her heart?

His life had always been strange to her, but by ceaseless imagining she had pictured it to herself so completely that she believed she could follow him day by day. Gilbert Grail had told her that he dwelt in a room full of books, near the British Museum, which also was full of books. Most of his time was spent in study; she understood what that meant. He did not give lectures now; that had come miserably to an end. He had a few friends, one or two men like himself, who thought and talked of high and wonderful things, and one or two ladies, of course—Mrs. Ormonde, and, perhaps, Miss Newthorpe. But probably Miss Newthorpe was married now. And, indeed, he did not care much to talk with ladies. He would go occasionally out of London, as he used to; perhaps would go abroad.

If he crossed the sea, he must think much of her, for the sea always brings thoughts of those one loves. And so he lived, only wishing for the time to go by.

Lydia's visit was on Sunday. She was to come immediately after dinner; and, perhaps, though it remained uncertain—for she had not ventured to speak of it in her letter—they would have tea with the Emersons.

What of Harold in the meantime? Things had been so different since that alarming event a year ago that Thyrza scarcely ever remembered it. Harold had, of course, kept his word; he had no choice. To Clara's amazement he proclaimed in a day or two that his holiday was at an end, and henceforth the City would summon him daily. His wife protested—was tearful. What of the poem? Oh, he did not forget the poem, be sure; a week or two of work in the evenings would complete it. But his health! How could he think of undertaking double toil in his present state? And for what reason? What *could* he mean? Harold put on a grave face and spoke with infinite consideration.

'The poem is taking too long, Clara. You speak of my health, dear, and have no consideration whatever for your own. I have noticed that you are by no means well. I am not satisfied for this state of things to be continued even for another fortnight. You will at once drop all your minor pupils, all the most tedious and the least profitable. I insist upon it, Clara.'

'But Harold! my dearest!' she pleaded with him,

‘this is the first time you have ever been unkind to me. I can’t understand you. Have I complained? Isn’t it my delight to give lessons—such foolish, easy work!—whilst you are writing your poem? You are very unkind to me!’

Then came tears and bewailing. The poor thing ransacked her mind for something she must have done or said that could bring him to this resolution. She must have shown too much how tired she was when she came in one night. It was hateful of her; it was wicked! Oh, would he not listen to her?

No, Harold was immutable in great resolve. He went to the City, and continued to go thither. And in a fortnight Clara was a happier woman than for a very long time.

Strange thing, the poem was never finished. Harold affected to work at it for a few nights, then he declared that there was no hurry; in fact, hurry would be absurd in a matter of this kind. Important sections of the poem wanted recasting, and he found that the end was not so easy to write as he had imagined. It was the culmination of prophecy, and must be pondered over. For a week he seemed to ponder. Then he declared that he needed variety, and took Clara to the theatre.

Whether it was this theatre-going—they went several times in the ensuing weeks—or whether the scene with Clara, when he made known his great resolve, had first turned his thoughts to histrionic matters, it became evident very soon that Harold had a new craze:



after talking much in a windy way, he announced his intention of writing a drama. More than that, he obscurely hinted that after all it was very possible that his own vocation was that of actor. The drama apparently made little headway, but Harold got in with a set of people who were much occupied with amateur acting, and henceforth he spent his time in learning speeches and mouthing them. Clara decided that after all this was really more amusing than the poem, though the connection Harold tried to establish between amateur theatricals and social amelioration was, perhaps, not very clear. Never mind; he and she were happy together, and what more was wanted?

No, not quite happy, at all events on Harold's side. It was characteristic of the man that his secret tortured him. By dint of much effort he succeeded in bearing himself towards Thyrza pretty much as before, but he soon grew convinced that only in one way could he make everything smooth. He had a childish irritability of conscience, and his real fondness for his wife made him fret over the thought that he had deceived her. A wise man would have blessed his stars that no harm had been done, and have dreaded nothing more than Clara's discovering what had happened. Harold was not wise, yet, to be just to him, he was very amiable, and in this impulse of his there was perhaps something better than wisdom, in the common sense of the word. Again he came to a tremendous determination; he would confess.

And he did so. It happened that about this time Thyrsa was pained by observing a decided coldness in Mrs. Emerson's manner to her. The friendly kiss was omitted; the friendly word was too obviously forced. What did it mean? For a fortnight this continued, then of a sudden the old kindness was re-established. Mr. Emerson had come nearer than he dreamt to driving Thyrsa from the house after all. His wife had received his confession with blank amazement, with terror, with weeping. Oh yes, she forgave him, forgave him very truly and tenderly, but to forgive Thyrsa was another matter. The indignant male reader points to Thyrsa's behaviour, explained in detail by Harold; the female reader (for whom I care more a thousand times) is not at all sure that she would not have acted as Clara did under the circumstances; she will not of course say so, but she thinks it. It was wrong of Harold to kiss the girl, but it was desperately provoking that the girl should have had the power to make him so crazy. Poor Harold never thought of this; but poor Clara said to herself: 'Reverse the parts; would he have kissed *me*?' Alas, alas! But there is in women infinite forgiveness; it can extend even to one of their own sex; aye, even to one more beautiful than themselves.

I do not think it once came to pass thereafter that Harold had a *tête-à-tête* with Thyrsa.

But Clara was now quite excited about the coming of Thyrsa's sister. Clara's own relatives were far from London, and she had really no friends but Mrs. Ormonde

and Thyrza ; it was an event for a stranger of her sex to enter her sitting-room. And about Thyrza's sister she was very curious. It had never been satisfactorily explained to her why Thyrza lived so alone ; perhaps the time had come when some light would be thrown upon this mystery. It was difficult to believe that Lydia would prove to be a work-girl of any ordinary type.

‘What if she be!’ cried Harold, when he and Clara spoke of the matter. ‘I rather think that *I* have no aristocratic prejudices, and I shall be surprised to hear that my wife has.’

‘Dear, your wife thinks whatever you do, you know that very well. I don't care if she is a charwoman ; I will welcome her.’

‘Well, well, there's no fear of that. After all, I don't know that we should be very comfortable at tea with a charwoman.’

‘No, Harold, perhaps not.’

Mrs. Emerson had much curiosity, but she was not ill-bred. She made no attempt to get a glimpse of Lydia as the latter went upstairs to Thyrza's room. Thyrza stood just within her open door. She had put a flower in her hair for the welcoming.

‘So this is where you have lived all this time,’ Lydia said, looking about the room. ‘How pretty it is, Thyrza ! But of course it's a lady's room.’

The other stood with her hands together before her, and, a little timidly, said :

‘Do I look like a lady? Suppose you didn’t know me, Lyddy, should you think I was a lady?’

‘Of course I should,’ her sister answered, though in a way which showed that she did not care to dwell on the subject.

Still, Thyrza laughed with pleasure.

‘And do you think I love my sister a bit the less?’

‘Of course I don’t.’

Lydia was not quite at her ease.

‘I’m not at all sure of that. Take your things off, and sit down in that chair, and talk to me as if we were in the old room at home. I must see our room again, Lyddy. I must see it before long.’

Lydia always had to overcome feelings of suspicion and remoteness at the beginning of her meetings with Thyrza; time had not changed her in this respect; she still feared that something was being concealed from her. And to-day it was long before she grew sufficiently accustomed to the room to talk with freedom. Thyrza lost all hope of persuading her to have tea with the Emersons. She was obliged to broach the subject, however, and it excited no less opposition than she had looked for. Lydia shrank from the thought. Yet, when Thyrza ceased to urge, and even exerted herself to make her sister forget all about it, Lydia said all at once:

‘Do you always have tea with them on Sundays?’

‘Yes. But it doesn’t make the least difference. I

have it here by myself other days, and I can do just as I like about it. Don't trouble, dear.'

'There won't be anybody except those two?'

'Oh no. There never is.'

Lydia changed her mind. Much as she disliked meeting strangers and sitting at their table, she felt a wish to see these people with whom Thyrza lived, that she might form her own opinion of them. Thyrza, much delighted, ran down at once to tell Mrs. Emerson.

Having made up her mind to face the trial, Lydia went through it as might have been expected, sensibly and becomingly. Mrs. Emerson made much of her; Harold was scrupulously polite. He, unfortunate fellow, all the time was wondering whether Thyrza had revealed a certain matter to her sister, and, if so, what the sister's opinion of him was. Through tea he addressed no word to Thyrza. Clara was bright and chirrupy; she talked about the advantage of living so near to the park; she spoke of the Zoological Gardens, which Lydia had never seen. 'Oh, but you must come up some day, and we'll all go together, won't we, Thyrza?' and she told her story of the two rival families in St. John's Wood, which, as about the only amusing incident in her experience of teaching, she repeated whenever she had an opportunity. After tea Mrs. Emerson played a little. Thyrza was asked to sing, but she excused herself as having no voice to-day. Her real reason was that she could only sing 'week-day' songs, and, though not cer-

tain, she thought it just possible that Lydia might dislike that kind of thing on Sunday. However, the good Lyddy had not quite reached that pass.

The sisters went upstairs again. Lydia had found Mrs. Emerson very different from her expectation, and was feeling a relief. She talked naturally once more. A subject of much interest to both was the approaching marriage of Totty Nancarrow.'

'But is it *quite* certain this time, Lyddy?'

'Oh, quite, dear. The names are up in the registry-office.'

Lydia knew nothing of Totty's fortune, nor did anyone else in Lambeth. To this day Totty and her husband have kept that a secret.

'Well, what a girl Totty is!' Thyrsa exclaimed. 'And she used to declare that she wouldn't be married on any account. Of course I always knew that was all nonsense. I shall go and see her some day, Lyddy, before long.'

Lydia noticed the frequency with which Thyrsa spoke of shortly seeing old places and old friends. It puzzled her, but she asked for no explanation. Perhaps all these mysteries would be at an end in time.

Thyrsa found it very hard to part to-night. She found numberless excuses for detaining Lydia from moment to moment, when it was really time for her to go. She was agitated, and as if with some great joy.

'Next Sunday, at the same time, Lyddy!' she repeated again and again.

‘But is there any fear of me forgetting it, dearest?’ urged her sister.

‘No, no! But I am so glad for you to come here. You like coming? I don’t think I shall write to you in the week; but of course you’ll write, if there’s anything. I *might* send a line; but no, I don’t think I shall. It’ll be such a short time till Sunday, won’t it? Does the week go quickly with you? Oh, we *must* say good-bye; it’s getting too late. Good-bye, my own, my dearest, my old Lyddy! Think of me every hour—I’m always the same to you, whatever kind of dress I wear; you know that, don’t you? Good-bye, dear Lyddy!’

She clung to Lydia and kissed her. They went downstairs together, then, before opening the door, again embraced and kissed each other silently.

When a few yards away, Lydia turned. Thyrsa stood on the door-step; light from within the house shone on her golden hair and just made her face visible. She was kissing her hand. . . .

It was Saturday. The week had been neither long nor short; Thyrsa could not distinguish the days in looking back upon them. She had not lived in time, but in the eternity of a rapturous anticipation. Her daily duties had been performed as usual, but with as little consciousness as if she had done all in sleep. She rose, and it was Saturday morning.

What time to-day? That he would let one day



pass had never occurred to her as a possibility. But perhaps he would be at Eastbourne in the morning, and in that case she must wait many hours. Happily, she had nothing to attend to ; to-day she could not even have pretended to live her wonted life.

Mrs. Emerson would be out till evening. No one would come upstairs to disturb about trifles.

She pretended to breakfast, then sat down by the window. She was fearful now, not for the event, but of her own courage when the time came. Could she stand before him ? In what words could she speak to him ? Yet she must not let him doubt what her two years had been. Would it be right to tell him that he came not unexpected, to confess that she had heard him when he spoke to Mrs. Ormonde ? Not at once, not to-day. He must know, but not to-day.

How short a time, two years ; how long, how endlessly long each hour on this day of waiting !

For the morning passed, and he did not come. He was at Eastbourne ; he had not even asked Mrs. Ormonde to keep her word till the very day came.

Her dinner was brought up, and was sent down again untouched. She sat still at the window. Every wheel that approached made her heart leap ; its dull rumbling into the distance sickened her with disappointment. But most likely he would walk to the house, and then she would not know till the servant came up to tell her.

Why had she not thought to get a railway-guide,

that she might know all the trains from Eastbourne? She could not now go out to purchase one; he would come in her absence. Perhaps the Emersons had one. She went to their sitting-room and found Harold alone. No, he regretted that he had not a railway-guide, but he would procure one for her in a very few minutes. Thyrza could not refuse the service. She sat down till Harold came back, heated with running to and from the nearest stationer's. She took the book and went to her room.

It drew to evening. Thyrza knew neither hunger nor thirst; she did not even feel weary. Dread was creeping upon her. She fought with it resolutely. She would be no traitor to herself, to him her other self. He might very well leave it till evening, to make sure of her being at home.

Her mind racked her with absurd doubts. Had she mistaken? *Was this the day?*

Pale and cold as marble, whilst the evening twilight died upon her face. She did not move. Better to sit so still that she forgot impatience, perchance forgot time. The vehicles in the street were fewer now; her heart-throbs as each drew near were the more violent. Nor would the inward pulse recover its quietness when there was silence. She heard it always; she felt it as an unceasing pain.

Why should she rise and light the lamp? If he did not come, what matter if she sat in darkness and pain for ever?

And the long summer evening did in truth become night. The street grew yet more quiet. She saw the moon, very clear and beautiful.

There sounded a loud double-knock at the street door. She sprang up and stood listening. It was a visitor to the Emersons. Even when assured of that, something in her would not believe it, hoped against conviction. But at length she went back to her chair. No tears; but the pain harder to bear than ever.

She awoke at very early morning; she was lying on her bed, fully clad. There was a dread in her mind at waking, and in a few moments she recognised it. Lydia was coming to-day. Would it be possible to sit and talk with her?

Only by clinging with stern determination to the last hope. Something had rendered it impossible for him to come yesterday, and to-day he was not likely to come; no, not to-day. But there was always the morrow. By refusing to think of anything but the morrow she might bear Lydia's presence.

Sunday, Monday; and now it was Tuesday at dawn. Thyrsa had but one thought in her mind. Mrs. Ormonde was treacherous. She had broken her promise. He was wishing to come to her, and knew not where she was—Lydia would not tell him. Lydia too was pitiless.

She had sat still in her room since Sunday night. She had pleaded illness to avoid all visits and all occupation. Whether really ill or no, she could not say.

Yes, there was the pain, but she had become so used to that. She only knew that the days and the nights were endless, that she no longer needed to eat, that the sunlight was burdensome to her eyes.

Clara had been troublesome with her solicitude; it had needed an almost angry word to secure privacy.

At mid-day Thyrza took up the railway-guide and sought for something in its pages. Then she began to attire herself for going out. She looked into her purse. In a few minutes she went quietly down the stairs, as if for an ordinary walk, and left the house.

## CHAPTER XI.

## EIRONEIA.

ON the Friday when Thyrza, in her happiness, had said 'To-morrow he comes,' Mrs. Ormonde also was thinking of a visitor, who might arrive at any hour. Nine days ago she had received a telegram from New York, informing her that Walter Egremont was there and about to embark for England. She, too, avoided leaving the house. Her impatience and nervousness were greater than she had thought such an event as this could cause her. But it was years now since she had begun to accept Walter in the place of her own dead son, and as that of a son she wished his return from the exile of twice twelve months. It was with joy that she expected him, though with one uncertainty which would give her trouble now and then, a doubt which was, she felt, shadowy, which the first five minutes of talk would put away.

She had dined, and was thinking that it was now too late to expect an arrival, when the arrival itself was announced.

'A gentleman asks if you will see him,' said the servant, 'Mr. Egremont.'

‘I will see him.’

He came quickly to her over the carpet, and they clasped hands. Then, as he heard the door close, Walter kissed the hand he held, kissed it twice with affection. They did not speak at first, but looked at each other. Mrs. Ormonde’s eyes shone.

‘How strong and well you look!’ were her first words. ‘You bring a breath from the Atlantic.’

‘Rather from a pestilent English railroad car!’

‘We say “railway” and “carriage,” Walter.’

‘Ah! I confused a cabman at Liverpool by talking about the “depôt.”’

He laughed merrily, a stronger and deeper laugh than of old. Personally he was not, however, much changed. He was still shaven, still stood in the same attitude; his smile was still the same inscrutable movement of the features. But his natural wiriness had become somewhat more pronounced, and the sea-tan on his cheeks prepared one for a robuster kind of speech from him than formerly.

‘Of course you have not dined. Let me go away for one moment.’

‘I thank you. Foreseeing this, I dined at the station.’

‘Then you behaved with much unkindness. Stand with your face rather more to the light. Yes, you are strong and well. I shall not say how glad I am to see you; perhaps I should have done, if you had waited to break bread under my roof.’

‘I shall sit down if I may. This journey from Liverpool has tired me much. Oh yes, I was glad as I came through the Midlands; it was poetry again, even amid smoke and ashes.’

‘But you must not deny your gods.’

‘Ah, poetry of a different kind. From Whitman to Tennyson.

And one an English home; grey twilight poured—

No, I deny nothing; one’s moods alter with the scene.’

‘I find that Mr. Newthorpe has good words for your Whitman.’

‘Of course he has. What man of literary judgment has not? He is here still?’

‘Not at present. They went a fortnight ago to Ullswater.’

‘To stay there till winter, I suppose?’

‘Or till late in autumn.’

Walter did not keep his seat, in spite of the fatigue he had spoken of. In a minute or two he was moving about the room, glancing at a picture or an ornament.

‘That photograph is new, I think,’ he said. ‘A Raphael?’

‘Andrea del Sarto.’

‘Barbarian that I am! I should have known Lucrezia’s face. And your poor little girls? I was grieved to hear of the death of Bunce’s child. I always think of poor Bunce as a heavily-burdened man.’

‘He came a month ago to see Bessie’s grave. He



talked to me in a very human way. And things are better with him. Pray sit down! No, there is nothing else new in the room.'

He seemed to obey with reluctance; his eyes still strayed. Mrs. Ormonde kept a subdued smile, and did her best to talk with ease of matters connected with his voyage, and the like. Walter's replies grew briefer. He said at last:

'The two years come to an end to-morrow.'

'They do.'

Mrs. Ormonde joined her hands upon her lap. She avoided his look.

'What have you to tell me of Thyrza?' he went on to ask, his voice becoming grave. 'When did you see her?'

'Quite recently. She is well and very cheerful.'

'Always so cheerful?'

'Yes.'

'And you will tell me now where she is?'

She looked him steadily in the face.

'You wish to know, Walter?'

'I have come to England to ask it.'

'Yes, I will tell you.'

And she named the address. Walter made a note of it in his pocket-book.

'And now will you also tell me fully about her life since I went away? I should like to know with whom she has been living, exactly how she has spent her time——'

‘Man of business!’

Mrs. Ormonde tried to jest, but did it nervously.

‘Do I seem to you coarser-grained than I used to be?’

‘More a man of the world, at all events. No, not fallen off in the way you mean. But I think you judge more soberly about grave matters. I think you know yourself better.’

‘Much better, if I am not mistaken.’

‘But still can have *la tête montée*, on occasion? Still think of many things in the idealist’s fashion?’

‘I sincerely hope so. Of everything, I trust.’

‘Could make great sacrifices for an imaginary obligation?’

He left his seat again. Mrs. Ormonde was agitated, and both kept silence for some moments.

‘It grieves me that you say that,’ Walter spoke at length, earnestly. ‘This obligation of mine is far from imaginary. That is not very like yourself, Mrs. Ormonde.’

‘I cannot speak so clearly as I should like to, Walter. I too have my troublesome thoughts.’

‘Let us go back to my questioning. Tell me everything about her, from the day when you decided what to do. Will you?’

‘Freely, and hide nothing whatever that I know.’

For a long time her narrative, broken by questioning, continued. Egremont listened with earnest countenance, often looking pleased. At the end, he said:

‘You have done a good work. I thank you with all my heart.’

‘Yes, you owe me thanks,’ Mrs. Ormonde returned, quietly. ‘But perhaps you give them for a mistaken reason.’

‘In what you have told me of the growth of her character, there is nothing that I did not foresee. It is good to know that, even then, I was under no foolish illusion. But the circumstances were needed, and you have supplied them. How can I be mistaken in thanking you for having so tended her who is to be my wife?’

‘Wait, Walter. You foresaw into what she might develop; it is true, and it enables us to regard the past without too much sadness. Did you foresee her perfect equanimity, when once she had settled down to a new life?’

He said hesitatingly, ‘No.’

‘Believing that she had taken such a desperate step purely through love of you, you thought it more than likely that she would live on in great unhappiness?’

‘Her cheerfulness surprises me. But it isn’t impossible to offer an explanation. She has foreseen what is now going to happen. She knows you are my friend; she sees that you are giving great pains to raise her from her former standing in life; what more likely than that she explains it all by guessing the truth? And so her cheerfulness is the most hopeful sign for me.’

‘That is plausible; but you are mistaken. Long ago I talked to her with much seriousness of all her future. I spoke of the chances of her being able to earn a living with her voice, and purposely discouraged any great hope in that direction. Her needlework, and what she has been trained to at the Home, were, I showed her, likely to be her chief resources. I have even tested her on the subject of her returning to live with her sister.’

‘Hope has overcome all these considerations. You kept her sister from knowing where she was. Why, if there was not some idea of severing her from her old associations?’

‘I explained it to her in one of our talks. I showed her that her rashness had made it very difficult to aid her.’

‘You spoke of me to her?’

‘Never, as I have told you. Nor has she ever mentioned you. I pointed out to her that of course I could not explain the state of things to the Emersons, and therefore Lydia had better not visit her for some time.’

Egremont sat down at a distance, and brooded.

‘But a contradiction is involved!’ he exclaimed presently. ‘How can a girl of her character have forgotten so quickly such profound emotion?’

‘You must not forget that weeks passed between my finding her and her going to live with the Emersons. During all that time the poor girl was wretched enough.’

‘Weeks!’

‘Her cheerfulness only came with time, after that.’

‘And it is your conviction that she has absolutely put me out of her mind? That she has found sufficient happiness in the progress she has felt herself to be making?’

‘That is my firm belief. Her character is not so easy to read as to-day’s newspaper. She can suffer, I think, even more than most women, but she has, too, far more strength than most women, a mind of a higher order, purer consolations. And she has art to aid her, a resource you and I cannot judge of with assurance.’

Walter looked up and said:

‘You are describing a woman who might be the most refined man’s ideal.’

‘I think so.’

‘You admit that Thyrza is in every way more than fit to be my wife?’

‘I will admit that, Walter.’

‘Then I am astonished at your tone in speaking of what I mean to do.’

‘You have asked me two questions,’ said Mrs. Ormonde, her face alight with conviction. ‘Please answer two of mine. Is this woman worthy of a man’s entire love?’

He hesitated, but answered affirmatively.

‘And have you that entire love to give her? Walter, the truth, for she is very dear to me.’

(In her room in London Thyrza sat, and said to herself, ‘To-morrow he comes!’)

He answered : ' I have not.'

'Then,' Mrs. Ormonde said, a slight flush in her cheeks, 'how can you express surprise at what I do?'

A long silence fell. Walter brooded, something of shame on his face from that confession. Then he came to Mrs. Ormonde's side, and took her hand.

'You are incapable,' he said gently, 'of conscious injustice. Had you said nothing of this to me, I should have gone to Thyrza to-morrow, and have asked her to marry me. She would not have refused ; even granting that her passion has gone, you know she would not refuse me, and you know too that I could enrich her life abundantly. My passion, too, is over, but I know well that love for such a woman as she is would soon awake in me. I do not think I should do her any injustice if I asked her to be my wife : shall I be unjust to her if I withhold?'

Mrs. Ormonde did not answer at once. She retained his hand, and her own showed how strongly she felt.

'Walter, I think it would be unjust to her if you asked her—remembering her present mind. It is not only that your passion for her is dead ; you think of another woman.'

'It is true. But I do not love her.'

She smiled.

'You are not ready to behave crazily about her ; no. But I believe that you love her in a truer sense than you ever loved Thyrza. You love her mind.'

'Has not Thyrza a mind?'

‘You do not know it, Walter. I doubt whether you would ever know it. Recall a letter you wrote to me, in which you dissected your own character. It was frank and in a very great measure true. You are not the husband for Thyrsa.’

‘You place Thyrsa above Annabel Newthorpe?’

It was asked almost indignantly, so that Mrs. Ormonde smiled and raised her hand.

‘You, it is clear, resent it.’

He reddened. Mrs. Ormonde continued:

‘I compare them merely. I don’t think Thyrsa will find the husband who is worthy of her, but I think it likely that she will win more love than you could ever give her. I have told you that she is dear to me. To you I would give a daughter of my own with entire confidence, for you are human and of noble impulses. But I do not wish you to marry Thyrsa. Yes, you read my thought. It is not solely the question of love. I wish you—I have so long wished you—to marry Annabel. To Thyrsa you do no least injustice by withholding your offer; she is happy without you. You are entirely free to consult your own highest interests. If I counsel wrongly, the blame is mine. But, Walter, you must after all decide for yourself. It is a most hazardous part this that I am playing; at least, it would be, if I did not see the facts of the case so clearly. Rest till to-morrow; then let us speak again. Shall it be so?’

Egremont left The Chestnuts and walked along the



shore in moonlight. His mind had received a shock, and the sense of disturbance affected him physically. He was obliged to move rapidly, to breathe the air.

He had left America with fixity of purpose. His plain duty was to go to Thyrza and ask her to marry him. Be her position what it might, his own was clear enough. He looked forward with a certain pleasure to the mere discharge of so plain an obligation.

Mrs. Ormonde had studiously refrained from expressing any thought with regard to the future in her letters. He quite expected that she would repeat to him with a certain emphasis the fact of Thyrza's present cheerfulness; but he did not anticipate serious opposition to the course he had decided upon. Practically Thyrza had lived in preparation for a life of refinement; Mrs. Ormonde, he concluded, knew that he could act but in one way, and, though refusing to do so ostensibly, had in fact been removing the rougher difficulties. Her attitude now surprised him, made him uneasy.

Yet he knew his own inability to resist her. He knew that she spoke on the side of his secret hope. He knew that a debate which had long gone on within himself, to himself unavowed, had at length to find its plain-spoken issue.

His passion for Thyrza was dead; he even wondered how it could ever have been so violent. It seemed to him that he scarcely knew her; could he not count on his fingers the number of times that he had seen her? So much had intervened between him and her, between

himself as he was then and his present self. It was with apprehension that he thought of marrying her. He knew what miseries had again and again resulted from marriages such as this, and he feared for her quite as much as for himself. For there was no more passion.

Neither on her side, it seemed. Was not Mrs. Ormonde right? Was it not to incur a wholly needless risk? And suppose the risk were found to be an imaginary one, what was the profit likely to be, to each of them?

But as often as he accepted what he held to be the common sense of the case, something unsettled him again. The one passion of his life had been for Thyrza. He called it dead; does not one mourn over such a death? He would not have recourse to the old dishonesty, and say that his love had been folly. Was it not rather the one golden memory he had? Was it not of infinite significance?

One loves a woman madly, and she gives proof of such unworthiness that love is killed. Why, even then the dead thing was inestimably precious; one would not forget it. And Thyrza was no woman of this kind. She had developed since he knew her; Mrs. Ormonde spoke of her as few can be justly spoken of. Was it good to let the love for such a woman pass away, when perchance the sight of her would revive it and make it lasting?

The stars and the night-wind and the breaking of

the sea—the sea which Thyrza loved—spoke to him. Could he not understand their language? . . .

On Monday morning he took the train to London, thence northwards. A visit to the Newthorpes after two years of absence was natural enough.

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE TRUTH.

MRS. ORMONDE was successful, but success did not bring her unmixed content. She was persuaded that what she had done was wholly prudent, that in years to come she would look back on this chapter of her life with satisfaction. Yet for the present she could not get rid of a shapeless misgiving. This little centre of trouble in the mind was easily enough accounted for. Granted that Thyrsa could live quite well without Walter Egremont, it was none the less true that, in losing him, she lost a certainty of happiness—and does happiness grow on every thicket, that one can afford to pass it lightly? The fear lest Egremont should reap misery from such a marriage, and cause misery in turn, was no longer seriously to be entertained; it could not now have justified interference, had there been nothing else that did so. Mrs. Ormonde could not rob Thyrsa thus without grieving.

But it was the happiness of two against that of one; and, however monstrous the dogma that one should be sacrificed even to a million, such a consideration is

wont to have weight with us when we are arguing with our conscience and getting somewhat the worst of it. Mrs. Ormonde felt sure that Annabel Newthorpe would not now reject Walter if he again offered himself; many things had given proof of that. Annabel knew that Thyrza had thoroughly outlived her trouble; she knew, moreover, that Egremont had never in reality compromised himself in regard to her. In her eyes, then, the latter was rather the victim of misfortune than himself culpable. If Walter eventually—of course, some time must pass—again sought to win her, without doubt he would tell her everything, and Annabel would find nothing in the story to make a perpetual barrier between them. The marriage which Mrs. Ormonde so strongly desired would still come about.

On the other hand, in spite of arguments that seemed irresistible, she could not dismiss the question: Does Thyrza know anything of Egremont's by-gone passion? That she could know anything of the compact which had run its two years, was of course impossible; but Walter's persistence in urging that, if once she had learnt his love for her, that, together with the circumstances of her life, would make sufficient ground for hope—this persistence had impressed Mrs. Ormonde. In a second long conversation the subject had been gone over, point by point, for a second time. 'If harm come,' Mrs. Ormonde said to herself, 'I am indeed to blame, for, though his wishes oppose it, I had but to show doubt and he would have taken the manly part

and have gone to Thyrsa.' She did not seek to defend herself by saying—as she might well have done—that throughout he encouraged her in her resistance. He was of firmer substance than two years ago, yet had not become, nor ever would, a vigorously independent man. In her hands the decision had lain—and the affair was decided.

On Tuesday, the day after Egremont's departure for the north of England, she was still thinking these thoughts. At four o'clock in the afternoon, having seen her children come in from the garden and gather for tea, she went with a book to spend an hour in the arbour where she had had that fateful conversation with Walter on the summer night. As she drew near to the covered spot, it seemed to her that there was a footfall behind on the grass. She turned her head, and with surprise saw Thyrsa.

With something more than surprise. As she looked in Thyrsa's face, that slight uneasiness in her mind changed to a dark misgiving, and from that to the certainty of fear. Thyrsa had never regarded her thus; and she herself had never seen features so passionately woe-stricken. The book fell from her hand; she could not utter a greeting.

'I want to speak to you, Mrs. Ormonde.'

'Come in here, Thyrsa. Why have you come? What has happened?'

She drew back under the shelter of leaf-twined

trellis, and Thyrza followed. Mrs. Ormonde met the searching eyes, and compassion helped her to self-command. She could not doubt what the first words spoken would be, yet the mystery of the scene was inscrutable to her.

‘I want to ask you about Mr. Egremont,’ Thyrza said, resting her trembling hand on the little rustic table. ‘I want to know where he is.’

Prepared as she had been, the words, really spoken, struck Mrs. Ormonde with new consternation. The voice was not Thyrza’s; it had no sweetness, but was like the voice of one who had suffered long exhaustion, who speaks with difficulty.

‘Yes, I will tell you where he is, Thyrza,’ the other replied, her own accents shaken with sympathy. ‘Why do you wish to hear of Mr. Egremont?’

‘I think you needn’t ask me that, Mrs. Ormonde.’

‘Yes, I must ask. I can’t understand why you should come like this, Thyrza. I can’t understand what has happened to make this change in you since I saw you last.’

‘Mrs. Ormonde, you do understand! Why should you pretend with me? You know that I have been waiting—waiting since Saturday.’

Thyrza spoke as if there were no mystery in her having attached a hope to that particular day. All but distraught as she was, she made no distinction between the mere fact of her abiding love, which she could not conceive that Mrs. Ormonde was ignorant of, and the incident of her having surprised a secret.



‘ Since Saturday ? ’ Mrs. Ormonde repeated. ‘ What did you wait for on Saturday ? ’

She had a wretched suspicion. From Egremont alone that information could have come to Thyrza. Had he played detestably false, having by some means, at the height of his passion, communicated with the girl ? But the thought could only pass through her mind ; it would not bear the light of reason for a moment. Impossible for him to speak and act so during these past days, knowing that his dishonesty was certain of being discovered. Impossible to attach such suspicion to him at all.

‘ I expected to see him,’ Thyrza replied. ‘ I knew he was to come in two years. I have waited all the time ; and now he has not come. I heard——’

She checked herself, and looked at the trellis at the back of the summer-house. She understood now that it was needful to explain her knowledge.

‘ You heard, Thyrza——?’

‘ That night that he was here. I had walked to look at your house. I was going home again when he passed me—he didn’t see me—and went into the garden. I couldn’t go back at once ; I had to sit down and rest. It was on the other side of the leaves.’ She pointed. ‘ I sat down there without knowing he would be here and I should hear him talking to you. I heard all you said—about the two years. I have been waiting for him to come.’

Mrs. Ormonde could not reply ; what words would

express what she felt in learning this? Thyrza's eyes were still fixed upon her.

‘I want you to tell me where he is, Mrs. Ormonde.’

It was a summons that could not be avoided.

‘Sit here, Thyrza. I will tell you. Sit down and let me speak to you.’

‘No, no! Tell me now! Why not? Why should I sit down? What is there to say?’

The words were not weakly complaining, but of passionate insistence. Thyrza believed that Mrs. Ormonde was preparing to elude her, was shaping excuses. Her eyes watched the other's every movement keenly, with fear and hostility. She felt within reach of her desire, yet held back by this woman from attaining it. Every instant of silence heightened the maddening tumult of her heart and brain. She had suffered so terribly since Saturday. It seemed as if her gentleness, her patience, were converted into their opposites, which now ruled her tyrannously.

‘Mr. Egremont is not in London,’ Mrs. Ormonde said at last. She dreaded the result of any word she might say. She was asking herself whether Walter ought not to be summoned back at once. Was it too late for that?

‘Not in London? Then where? You saw him on Saturday?’

‘Yes, I saw him.’

‘And you would not tell him where I was, Mrs. Ormonde? You spoke like you did that night. You

persuaded him not to come to me—when I was waiting. I forgave you for what you said before, but now you have done something that I shall never forgive——’

‘Thyrza——’

‘There’s nothing you can say will make me forgive you! Your kindness to me hasn’t been kindness at all. It was all to separate me from him. What have you told him about me? You have said I don’t think of him any more. You made him believe I wasn’t fit for him. And now you will refuse to tell me where he is.’

‘Thyrza!’

Mrs. Ormonde took the girl’s hands forcibly in her own, and held them against her breast. She was pale and overcome with emotion.

‘Thyrza, you don’t know what you are saying! Do, force yourself to be calmer, so that you can listen to me.’

‘Don’t hold my hands, Mrs. Ormonde! I have loved you, but I can’t pretend to, now that you have done this against me. I will listen to you, but how shall I believe what you say? I didn’t think one woman could be so cruel to another as you have been to me. You don’t know what it means, to wait as I have waited; if you knew, you’d never have done this; you wouldn’t have had the heart to do this to me.’

‘My poor child, think, think—*how* could I know that you were waiting? You forget that you have only just told me your secret for the first time. I have

seen you always so full of life and gladness, and how was I to dream of this sudden change ?’

Thyrza listened, and as if imperfectly comprehending, examined the speaker’s face in silence.

‘I am not the cruel woman you call me,’ Mrs. Ormonde went on. ‘I had no idea that your happiness depended upon meeting with Mr. Egremont again.’

‘You had no idea of that ?’ Thyrza asked, slowly, wonderingly. ‘You say that you didn’t know I loved him ?’

‘Not that you still loved him. Two years ago—I knew it was so then. But I fancied——’

‘You thought I had forgotten all about him ? How could you think that ? Is it possible to love anyone and forget so soon, and live as if nothing had happened ? That cannot be true, Mrs. Ormonde. I know you *wished* me to forget him. And that is what you told him when you saw him on Saturday ! You said I thought no more of him, and that it was better he shouldn’t see me ! Oh, what right had you to say that ? Where is he now ? You say you are not cruel ; let me know where I can find him.’

There was but one answer to make, yet Mrs. Ormonde dreaded to utter it. The girl’s state was such that it might be fatal to tell her the truth. Passion such as this, nursed to this through two years in a heart which could affect calm, must be very near madness. Yet what help but to tell the truth ? Unless she feigned that Egremont’s failure to come on Satur-

day was her fault, in the sense Thyrza believed, and then send for him, that this terrible mischief might be undone?

If only she could have time to reflect. Whatever she did now, in this agitation, she might bitterly repent. Only under stress of the direst necessity could she summon Egremont back; there was something repugnant to her instinct, something impossible, in the thought of undoing all she had done. Egremont's position would be ignoble. Impossible to retrace her steps!

'I have no wish to prevent you from seeing him, Thyrza,' she said, making her resolve even as she spoke. 'He is not in London now, but he will be back before long, I think.'

'Is he in England?'

'Yes; in the north. He has gone to see friends. You don't know that he has been in America during these two years?'

Something was gained if Thyrza could be brought to listen with interest to details.

'In America? But he came back at the time. How could you refuse to keep your promise? What did he say to you? How could he go away again and let you break your word to him in that way?'

Mrs. Ormonde said, as gently as she could:

'I didn't break my word, Thyrza. I gave him your address. He had it on Friday night.'

She, whose nature it was to trust implicitly, now

dreaded a deceit in every word. She gazed at Mrs. Ormonde, without change of countenance.

And,' she said, slowly, 'you persuaded him not to come.'

Mrs. Ormonde paused before replying.

'Thyrza, is all your faith in me at an end? Cannot I speak to you like I used to, and be sure that you trust my kindness to you, that you trust my love?'

'Your love?' Thyrza repeated, more coldly than she had spoken yet. 'And you persuaded him not to come to me.'

'It is true, I did.'

Mrs. Ormonde had never spoken to anyone with a feeling of humiliation like this which made her bend her head. Thyrza still looked at her, but no longer with hostility. She gazed with wonder, with doubt.

'Why did you do that to me, Mrs. Ormonde?'

There was heart-breaking pathos in the simple words. Tears rushed to the listener's eyes.

'My child, if I had known the truth, I should have said not a word to prevent his going. I did not know that you still loved him, hard as it is for you to believe that. I was deceived by your face. I have watched you month after month, and, as I knew nothing of your reason for hope, I thought you had found comfort in other things. Cannot you believe me, Thyrza?'

'And you told him that?'

‘Yes, I told him what I thought was the truth. Thyrsa, I *have* been cruel to you, but I had no thought that I was so.’

Thyrza asked, after a silence :

‘But you told him where I was living?’

‘I told him; he asked me, and I told him, as I had promised I would.’

Thyrza stood in deep thought. Mrs. Ormonde again took her hands.

‘Dear, come and sit down. You are worn out with your trouble. Don’t repel me, Thyrsa. I have done you a great wrong, and I know you cannot feel to me as you did; but I am not so hard-hearted that your suffering does not pierce me through. Only sit here and rest.’

She allowed herself to be led to the seat. Her eyes rested on the ground for a while, then strayed to the leaves about her, which were golden with the sunlight they intercepted, then turned again to Mrs. Ormonde’s face.

‘He knew where I lived. How could you be sure he wouldn’t come to me?’

Mrs. Ormonde sunk her eyes and made no reply.

‘Did he promise you that he would never come?’

‘He made me no promise, Thyrsa.’

‘No promise? Then how do you know that he won’t come?’

A gleam shot to her eyes. But upon the moments of hope followed a revival of suspicion.



‘You say you can’t prevent me from seeing him. Tell me where he is—the place. You won’t tell me?’

‘And if I did, how would it help you?’

‘Cannot I go there? Or can’t I write and say that I wish to speak to him.’

‘Thyrza, I asked no promise from him that he wouldn’t go to you. I don’t think you would really try to see him, knowing that he has your address.’

‘You asked no promise, Mrs. Ormonde, but you persuaded him! You spoke as you did two years ago. You told him I could never make a fit wife for him, that he couldn’t be happy with me, nor I with him.’

‘No; I did not speak as I did two years ago. I know you much better than I did then, and I told him all that I have since learnt. No one could speak in higher words of a woman than I did of you, and I spoke from my heart, for I love you, Thyrza, and your praise is dear to me.’

That fixed, half-conscious gaze of the blue eyes was hard to bear, so unutterably piteous was it, so wofully it revealed the mind’s anguish. Mrs. Ormonde waited for some reply, but none came.

‘You do not doubt this, Thyrza?’

Still no answer.

‘Suppose I give you the address, do you feel able to write, before he has——?’

There was a change in the listener’s face. Mrs. Ormonde sprang to her, and saved her from falling. Nature had been tried at last beyond its powers.

Mrs. Ormonde could not leave the unconscious form ; her voice would not be heard if she called for help. But the fainting fit lasted a long time. Thyrza lay as one who is dead ; her features calm, all the disfiguring anguish passed from her beauty. Her companion had a moment of terror. She was on the point of hastening to the house, when a sign of revival checked her. She supported Thyrza in her arms.

‘Thank you, Mrs. Ormonde,’ was the latter’s first whisper, the tone as gentle and grateful as it was always wont to be.

‘Can you sit alone for a minute, dear, while I fetch something?’

‘I am well, quite well again, thank you.’

Mrs. Ormonde went and speedily returned. Thyrza was sitting with her eyes closed. They spoke only broken words. But at length Mrs. Ormonde said:

‘You must come into the house now, Thyrza. You shall be quite alone ; you must lie down.’

‘No, I can’t stay here, Mrs. Ormonde. I must go back before it gets too late. I must go to the station.’

Even had Thyrza’s condition allowed of this, her friend would have dreaded to lose sight of her now, to let her travel to London and thereafter be alone. After trying every persuasion, she refused to allow her go.

‘You must stay here for the night, Thyrza. You must. I have much more to say to you. But first you must rest. Come with me.’

Her will was the stronger. Thyrza at length suffered herself to be taken into the house, and to a room where she could have perfect quietness. Mrs. Ormonde alone waited upon her, brought her food, did everything to soothe body and mind. By sunset, the weary one was lying with her head on the pillow. On a table within her reach was a bell, whose sound would at once summon her attendant from the next room.

At ten o'clock Mrs. Ormonde entered silently. Three nights of watching, and the effects of all she had endured this afternoon, were weighing heavily on Thyrza's eyelids, though as yet she could not sleep. Foreseeing this, Mrs. Ormonde had brought a draught, which would be the good ally of nature striving for repose. Thyrza asked no question, but drank what was offered like a child.

'Now you will soon rest, dear. I must not ask you to kiss me, Thyrza?'

The lips were offered. They were cold, for passion lay dead upon them. She did not speak, but sank back with a sigh and closed her eyes.

Again at midnight Mrs. Ormonde entered. The small taper which burnt in the room showed faintly the sleeping face. Standing by the bed, she felt her heart so wrung with sorrow that she wept.

In the morning Thyrza declared that she did not suffer. She rose and sat by the open window. She fancied she could hear the sea.

‘ You said you had more to tell me, Mrs. Ormonde,’ she began, when the latter sat silently by her.

‘ To speak with you and to try to help you, my child, that was all.’

‘ But you told me very little yesterday. I am not sure that I understood. You need not be afraid to tell me anything. I can bear anything.’

‘ Will you ask me what you wish to know, Thyrsa ?’

‘ You say you persuaded him—and yet that you said good of me.’

The other waited.

‘ Didn’t he come from America to see me ?’

‘ He did.’

‘ You mean that he came because he thought it was right to. I understand. And when you told him that I was not thinking of him, he—he felt himself free ?’

‘ Yes.’

‘ Do you think—is it likely that he will ever wish to see me now ?’

‘ If he knew that you had suffered because he did not come, he would be with you in a few hours.’

Thyrsa gazed thoughtfully.

‘ And he would ask me to marry him ?’

‘ Doubtless he would.’

‘ So when you persuaded him not to see me, he was glad to know that he *need* not come ?’

It was a former question repeated in another way.

Mrs. Ormonde kept silence. It was several minutes before Thyrza spoke again.

‘I don’t know whether you will tell me, but did he think of anyone else as well as of me when he came back to England?’

‘I am not sure, Thyrza.’

‘Will you tell me what friends he has gone to see?’

‘Their name is Newthorpe.’

‘Miss Newthorpe—the same I once saw here?’

‘Yes.’

‘What is Miss Newthorpe’s name, Mrs. Ormonde?’

‘Annabel.’

Thyrza moved her lips as if they felt parched. She asked nothing further, seemed indeed to forget that she had been conversing. She watched the waving branches of a tree in the garden.

Mrs. Ormonde had followed the working of the girl’s mind with intense observation. She knew not whether to fear or to be glad of the strange tranquillity that had succeeded upon such uncontrolled vehemence. What she seemed to gather from Thyrza’s words she scarcely ventured to believe. It was a satisfaction to her that she had avoided naming Egremont’s address, yet a satisfaction that caused her some shame. Indeed, it was the sense of shame that perhaps distressed her most in Thyrza’s presence. Egremont’s perishable love, her own prudential forecasts and schemings, were stamped poor, worldly, ignoble, in comparison with this sacred and inextinguishable ardour. As a woman she felt her-

self rebuked by the ideal of womanly fidelity; she was made to feel the inferiority of her nature to that which fate had chosen for this supreme martyrdom. In her glances at Thyrsa's face she felt, with new force, how spiritual was its beauty. For in soulless features, however regular and attractive, suffering reveals the flesh; this girl, stricken with deadly pallor, led the thoughts to the purest ideals of womanhood transfigured by woe in the pictures of old time.

‘I will go by the train at twelve o'clock,’ Thyrsa said, moving at length.

‘I want you to stay with me till to-morrow—just till to-morrow morning, Thyrsa. If my presence pains you, I will keep away. But stay till to-morrow.’

‘If you wish it, Mrs. Ormonde.’

‘Will you go out? Into the garden? To the shore?’

‘I had rather stay here.’

She kept her place by the window through the whole day, as she had sat in her own room in London. She could not have borne to see the waves white on the beach and the blue horizon; the sea that she had loved so, that she had called her friend, would break her heart with its song of memories. She must not think of anything now, only, if it might be, put her soul to sleep and let the sobbing waters of oblivion bear it onwards through the desolate hours. She had no pain; her faculties were numbed; her will had spent itself.

Mrs. Ormonde brought her meals, speaking only a word of gentleness. In the evening Thyrza said to her :

‘ Will you stay a few minutes ? ’

She sat down and took Thyrza’s hand. The latter continued :

‘ I shall be glad if they would give me the sewing to do again, and the work at the Home. Do you think they will, Mrs. Ormonde ? ’

‘ Don’t you wish to go on with your lessons ? ’

‘ No. I can’t stay there if I don’t earn enough to pay for everything. I shall try to keep on with the singing.’

It was perhaps wiser to yield every point for the present.

‘ It shall be as you wish, Thyrza,’ Mrs. Ormonde replied.

After a pause :

‘ Mrs. Emerson will wonder where I am. Will you write to her, so that I needn’t explain when I get back to-morrow ? ’

‘ I have just had an anxious letter from her, and I have already answered it.’

Thyrza withdrew her hand gently.

‘ I was wrong when I spoke in that way to you yesterday, Mrs. Ormonde,’ she said, meeting the other’s eyes. ‘ You haven’t done me harm intentionally ; I know that now. But if you had let him come to me, I don’t think he would have been sorry—afterwards—



when he knew I loved him. I don't think anyone will love him more. I was very different two years ago, and he thinks of me as I was then. Perhaps, if he had seen me now, and spoken to me—I know I am still without education, and I am not a lady, but I could have worked very hard, so that he shouldn't be ashamed of me.'

Mrs. Ormonde turned her face away and sobbed.

'I won't speak of it again,' Thyrza said. 'You couldn't help it. And he didn't really wish to come, so it was better. I am very sorry for what I said to you, Mrs. Ormonde.'

But the other could not bear it. She kissed Thyrza's hands, her tears falling upon them, and went away.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## HER RETURN.

It was a rainy autumn, and to Thyrza the rain was welcome. A dark, weeping sky helped her to forget that there was joy somewhere in the world, that there were some whom golden evenings of the declining year called forth to wander together and to look in each other's faces with the sadness born of too much bliss. When a beam of sunlight on the wall of her chamber greeted her as she awoke, she turned her face upon the pillow and wished that night were eternal. If she looked out upon the flaming heights and hollows of a sunset between rain and rain, it seemed strange that such a scene had ever been to her the symbol of hope ; it was cold now and very distant ; what were the splendours of heaven to a heart that perished for lack of earth's kindly dew ?

To the eyes of those who observed her, she was altered indeed, but not more so than would be accounted for by troubles of health, consequent upon a sort of fever—they said—which had come upon her in the hot summer days. In spite of her desire, this weakness had

obliged her to give up her singing-practice for the present ; Dr. Lambe, Mrs. Ormonde's acquaintance, had said that the exertion was too much for her. What else that gentleman said, in private to Mrs. Ormonde, it is not necessary to report ; it was a graver repetition of something that he had hinted formerly. Mrs. Ormonde had been urgent in her entreaty that Thyrza would come to Eastbourne for a time, but could not prevail. Mrs. Emerson refused to believe that the illness was anything serious. 'I assure you,' she said to Mrs. Ormonde, 'Thyrza is in anything but low spirits as a rule. She doesn't laugh quite so much as she used to, but I can always make her as bright as possible by chatting with her in my foolish way for a few minutes. And when her sister comes on Sunday, there's not a trace of gloom discoverable. I've noticed it's been the same with her the last two autumns ; she'll be all right by winter.'

It was true that she disguised her mood with almost entire success during Lydia's visits. Lydia herself, for some cause, was very cheerful throughout this season ; she believed with more readiness than usual when Thyrza spoke of her ailments as trifling. Every Sunday she brought a present of fruit ; Thyrza knew well with how much care the little bunch of grapes or the sweet pears had been picked out on Saturday night at the fruit-shop in Lambeth Walk.

'You're a foolish old Lyddy, to spend your money

on me in this way,' she said once. 'As if I hadn't everything I want.'

'Yes, but,' said Lydia, laughing, 'if I don't give you something now and then, you'll forget I'm your elder sister. And I shall forget it too, I think. I've begun to think of you as if you was older than me, Thyrza.'

'So I am, dear, as I told you a long time ago.'

'Oh, you can talk properly, which I can't, and you can write well, and read hard books, but I used to nurse you on my lap for all that. And I remember you crying for something I couldn't let you have, quite well.'

Thyrza laughed in her turn, a laugh from a heart that mocked itself. Crying for something she might not have—was she then so much older?

To Lydia nothing was told of the cessation of lessons, and on Sunday all signs of needlework were hidden away. Mrs. Emerson of course knew the change that had been made, but it was explained to her as all being on the score of health, and Thyrza had begged her to make no allusion to the subject on the occasional evenings when Lydia had tea in Clara's room. And Clara was of opinion that it was very wise to rest for a while from books. 'Depend upon it, it's your brain-work that brought about all this mischief,' she said. 'I know too much about that kind of thing from my husband.'

And after bidding her sister good-bye with a merry

face, Thyrza would go up to her room, and sink down in weariness of body and soul, and weep her fill of bitter tears.

The nights were so long. She never lay down before twelve o'clock, knowing that it was useless; then she would hear the heavy-tongued bells tolling each hour till nearly dawn. It was like the voice of a remorseless enemy. 'I am striking the hour of Two. You think that you will not hear me when I strike next; you weep and pray that sleep may close your ears against me. But wait and see!' She would sometimes, in extremity of suffering, fling her body down, and let her arms fall straight, and whisper to herself: 'I look now so like death, that perchance death will come and take me.' That she might die soon was her constant longing.

There were times when her youth asserted itself and bade her strive, bade her put away the vain misery and look out again into the world of which she had seen so little. A few weeks ago she had rejoiced in the acquiring of knowledge, and longed to make the chambers of her mind rich from the fields to which she had been guided, and which lay so sunny-flowered before her. But that was when she had looked forward to sharing all with her second and dearer self. Now, when her thoughts strayed, it was to gather the flowers of deadly fragrance which grow in the garden of despair. The brief glimpses of health made the woe which followed only darker.

A strange, unreal hope, an illusion of her tortured mind, even now sometimes visited her. It was certain that Egremont knew where she lived; it might be that even yet he would come. Perhaps Miss Newthorpe would not receive him as he hoped. Perhaps Mrs. Ormonde would have pity, and would tell him the truth, and then he could not let her perish of vain longing. What other could love him as she did? Who else thought of him: 'You are all to me; in life or death there is nothing for me but you'? If he knew that, he would come to her.

She had read a story somewhere of someone being drawn to her who loved him by the very force of her passionate longing. In the dread nights she wondered if such a thing were possible. She would lie still, and fix her mind on him, till all of her seemed to have passed away save that one thought. She was back again in the library, helping to put books on the shelves. Oh, that was no two years ago; it was yesterday, this morning! Not a tone of his voice had escaped her memory. She had only to think of the moment when he held his hand to her and said, 'Let us be friends,' and her heart leaped now as it had leaped then. Could not her passion reach him, wherever he was? Could he sleep peacefully through nights which for her were one long anguish?

So it went on to winter, and now she had more rest; her brain was dulled with the foul black atmosphere; she slept more, though a sleep which seemed to weigh

her down, an unhealthful torpor. The passion of her misery had burned itself out.

Lydia came and spent Christmas Day with her. They talked of their memories, and Thyrza asked questions about Gilbert Grail, as she had several times done of late. Lydia had no very cheerful news to give of him.

‘Mrs. Grail can’t do any work now. She sits by the fire all day, and at night she won’t let him do anything but talk to her. It isn’t at all a good servant they’ve got. She’s expected to come at eight in the morning, but it’s almost always nine before she gets there.’

‘Couldn’t you find someone better, Lyddy?’

‘I’m trying to, but it isn’t easy. I do what I can myself. Mrs. Grail sometimes seems as if she doesn’t like me to come about. She wouldn’t speak to me this morning; I’m sure I don’t know why. She’s changed a great deal from what she was when you knew her. And she can’t bear to have things moved in the room for cleaning; she gets angry with the servant about it, and then the girl talks to her as she shouldn’t, and it makes her cry.’

‘Is she impatient with Gilbert?’ Thyrza asked.

‘No, I don’t think so. But she always wants him to be by her. If he’s a few minutes late, she knows it, and begins to fret and worry.’

‘So he sits all the evening just keeping her company?’



‘Yes. He reads to her a good deal, generally out of those religious books—you remember? I feel sorry for her; I’m so sure there’s other things he might read would give her a deal more comfort. And you’d think he never got a bit tired, he’s that kind and good to her, Thyrza.’

‘Yes, I know he must be. Does Mr. Ackroyd ever come to see him?’

‘Not to the house, no. Nobody comes.’

Thyrza was very silent after this.

Two weeks later, when the new year was frost-bound, Lydia received this letter from her sister:

‘I want to come and see you in the old room, as I said I should, and at the same time I want to see Gilbert. But I must see him alone. I could come at night, and you could be at the door to let me in, couldn’t you, dear? You said that Mrs. Grail goes to bed early; I could see Gilbert after that. You may tell him that I am coming, and ask him if he will see me. I hope he won’t refuse. Write and let me know when I shall be at the door—to-morrow night, if possible. You will be able to send a letter that I shall get by the first post in the morning.’

Had the visit proposed been a secret one, to herself alone, Lydia would not have been much surprised, as Thyrza had several times of late said that she wished to come. But the desire to see Gilbert was something of which no hint had been given till now. Strange fancies ran through her head. She doubted so much

on the subject, that she resolved to say nothing to Gilbert; if Thyrza persisted in her wish, it would be possible to arrange the interview when she was in the house. She wrote in reply that she would be standing at the front door at half-past eight on the following evening.

Exactly at the moment appointed, a closely-wrapped figure hurried through the darkness out of Kennington Road to the door where Lydia had been waiting for several minutes. The door was at once opened. Thyrza ran silently up the stairs; her sister followed; and they stood together in their old home.

Thyrza threw off her outer garments. She was panting from haste and agitation; she fixed her eyes on Lydia, but neither spoke nor smiled.

‘Are you sure you did right to come, dearest?’ Lydia said in a low voice.

‘Yes, Lyddy, quite sure,’ was the grave answer.

‘You look worse to-night—you look ill, Thyrza.’

‘No, no, I am quite well. I am glad to be here.’

Thyrza seated herself where she had been used to sit, by the fireside. Lydia had made the room as bright as she could. But to Thyrza how bare and comfortless it seemed! Here her sister had lived, whilst she herself had had so many comforts about her, so many luxuries. That poor, narrow bed—there she had slept with Lyddy; there, too, she had longed vainly for sleep, and had shed her first tears of secret sorrow. Nothing whatever seemed altered. But yes, there was

something new ; above the bed's head hung on the wall a picture of a cross, with flowers twined about it, and something written underneath. Noticing that, Thyrsa at once took her eyes away.

‘It’s a bitter night,’ Lydia said, approaching her and examining her face anxiously. ‘You must be very careful in going back ; you seem to have got a chill now, dear ; you tremble so. I’ll stir the fire, and put more coals on.’

‘You told Gilbert ?’ Thyrsa asked, suddenly. ‘You didn’t mention it in your letter. He’ll see me, won’t he ?’

‘No, I haven’t spoken to him yet, dear. I thought it better to leave it till you were here. I’m sure he’ll see you, if you really wish.’

‘I do wish, Lyddy. I’m sorry you left it till now. Why did you think it better to leave it ?’

‘I don’t quite know,’ the other said, with embarrassment. ‘It seemed strange that you wanted to see him.’

‘Yes, I wish to.’

‘Then I’ll go down in a few minutes and tell him.’

They ceased speaking. Lydia had knelt by her sister, her arm about her. Thyrsa still trembled a little, but was growing more composed. Presently she bent and kissed Lydia’s hair.

‘You didn’t believe me when I said I should come,’ she whispered, smiling for the first time.

‘Are you sure you ought to have come ? Would Mrs. Ormonde mind ?’

‘I am quite free, Lyddy. I can do as I like. I would come in daylight, only perhaps it would be disagreeable for you, if people saw me. I know they have given me a bad name.’

‘No one that we need to care about, Thyrza.’

‘Gilbert has no such thoughts now?’

‘Oh no!’

‘Shall I see much change in him?’

‘Not as much as he will in you, dearest.’

They were silent again for a long time, then Lydia went to speak with Gilbert. Alone, Thyrza tried to recall the mind with which she had gone down to have tea with the Grails on a Sunday evening. It used to cause her excitement, but that was another heart-throb than this which now pained her. In those days Gilbert Grail was a mystery to her, inspiring awe and reverence. How would he meet her now? Would he have bitter words for her? No, that would be unlike him. She *must* stand before him, and say something which had been growing in her since the dark days of winter began. Only the utterance of those words would bring her peace. No happiness; happiness and she had nothing to do with each other. She thought she would not live very long; she must waste no more of the days that remained to her. There was need of her here at all events. The parting from her sister would be at an end; Lydia would rejoice. He too, yes, *he* would be glad, for he would know nothing of the truth. It might be that his whole future life would be made

lighter by this act of hers. Mrs. Ormonde alone would understand ; it would give her pleasure to know that Gilbert Grail's sorrow was at an end.

So many people to be benefited, and the act itself so simple, so merely a piece of right-doing, the reparation of so great an injury. Strange that her whole mind had undergone this renewal. Half a year ago, death would have been chosen before this.

Lydia returned.

'Mrs. Grail will be gone in half an hour. He will see you then, Thyrza.'

Very few words were interchanged as the time passed. They held each other by the hand. At length Lydia, hearing a sound below, went to the door.

'You can go now,' she said, returning. 'Shall I come down with you?'

'No, Lyddy.'

'Oh, can you bear this, Thyrza?'

The other smiled, made a motion with her hand, and went out with a quick step.

The parlour door—entrance so familiar to her—was half open. She entered, and closed it. Gilbert came forward. His face was not at all what she had feared ; he smiled pleasantly, and offered his hand.

'So you have come to see me as well as Lydia. It is kind of you.'

The words might have borne a very different meaning from that which his voice and look gave them. He spoke with perfect simplicity, as though no painful

thought could be excited by the meeting. Thyrza saw, in the instant for which her eyes read his countenance, that he did not often smile thus. He was noticeably an older man than when she abandoned him; his beard was partly grizzled, his eyes were yet more sunken. There was some change, too, in his voice; its sound did not recall the past quite as she had expected.

But the change in her was so great that he could not move his eyes from her. When she looked up again, he still seemed to be endeavouring to recognise her.

‘I didn’t know whether you would see me,’ she said with hurried breath.

‘I am very, very glad to see you.’

He seemed about to ask her to sit down. His eyes fell on the chair which was always called hers. Thyrza noticed it at the same time. From it she looked to him. Gilbert averted his eyes.

‘I did not come to see Lyddy,’ Thyrza said, forcing her voice to steadiness. ‘It was to speak to you. I didn’t dare to hope you would be so——’

‘Don’t say what it pains you to say,’ Gilbert spoke, when her words failed. ‘It will pain me even more. Speak to me like an old friend, Miss Trent.’

‘Can you still feel like a friend to me?’

‘I don’t change much,’ he said. ‘And it would be a great change that would make me have any but friendly thoughts of you.’

She raised her face.

‘I behaved so cruelly to you. If I could hope that you would forgive that——’

A sob broke her voice.

‘Don’t talk of forgiveness!’ Gilbert replied, with less self-control. ‘I have never thought a hard thought of you. I can’t bear to hear *you* speak in that voice to me.’

The tenderness he had concealed found expression in the last words. Her wonderful new beauty, the humility of her bowed head, her tears, overcame the show he had made of easy friendliness. He saw her eyes turned to him again, and this time he met their gaze.

‘Do you know all of my life since I left you?’ Thyrza asked. ‘Lyddy knows how I have lived all the time, from that day to this. Has she told you?’

‘Yes, she has told me.’

‘Will you let me fulfil the promise I made to you? Can you forget what I have done? Will you let me be your companion—do all I can to make your home a happy one? I have no right to ask, but if—if not now—if some day I could be a help to you! I will come to live with Lyddy. We will find a room somewhere else. I will work with Lyddy, till you can let me come——’

Her pallor had turned to a deep flush. She spoke brokenly, till her lips became mute, the last word dying in a whisper. She had not known what it would cost her to say this. A deadly shame enfolded her; she



could have sunk to the ground before him after the first sentence.

Gilbert listened and was shaken. He knew that this was no confession of love for him, but of the sincerity of what she had said he could have no doubt. There was not disgrace upon her; she humbled herself solely in grief for the suffering she had caused him. He loved her, loved her the more for the awe her matured beauty inspired in him. That Thyrza should come and speak thus, was more like a dream than simple reality. And for all his longing, he durst not touch her hand.

‘What you offer me,’ he said, in low, tremulous accents, ‘I should never have dared to ask, for it is the greatest gift I can imagine. You are so far above me now, Thyrza. I should take you into a life that you are no longer fit for. My home must always be a very poor one; it would shame me to give you nothing better than that.’

‘I want nothing more than to be with you, Gilbert. I am not above you; you are better in everything. I broke a promise which ought to have been sacred. If you let me share your life, that is your forgiveness. I want you to forgive me; I want to be a help to you still; I wish to forget all that came between us. You won’t reject me?’

‘Oh, Thyrza, I love you too much! I am too selfish to act as I ought to! Thyrza! That you can be my wife still, when no spark of hope was left to me!’ . . .

It did not seem to Lydia that she had waited long when she heard her sister's step on the stairs again.

'I mustn't stay another minute,' Thyrza said, going at once to where her hat and cloak lay. 'It will be late before I get home.'

'I shall come with you as far as the 'bus.'

Lydia would have asked no question, though agitated with wonder and a surmise she scarcely dared to entertain. When they were both ready to go out, Thyrza turned to her.

'Gilbert has been very good to me, Lyddy. He will forget all the harm I have done him, and I shall be his wife.'

The other could find no word for a moment.

'Are you glad of this, Lyddy?'

'I don't know what to think or say,' her sister replied, looking at her with half-tearful earnestness. 'Did you always mean this, when you said you were coming here soon?'

'No, not always. But I was able to do it at last. Now I shall rest, dear sister.'

'You are sure that this is right? It isn't only a fancy, that you'll be sorry for, that'll make everything worse in the end?'

'I shall never be sorry, and everything will be better, Lyddy.'

They kissed each other.

'Come, dear, I mustn't wait.'

They walked quickly and without speaking as far as

the lights and noise of Westminster Bridge Road. For them the everyday movement of the street had no meaning; such things were the mere husk of life; each was absorbed in her own being.

‘I shall come again on Saturday night,’ Thyrza said hurriedly, as they parted. ‘And perhaps I shall stay over Sunday. May I?’

‘Do!’

‘Be at the door again at the same time.’

## CHAPTER XIV.

## HER REWARD.

THIS was on Thursday. The two days which followed were such as come very rarely in a London winter. Fog had vanished; the ways were clean and hard; between the house-tops and the zenith gleamed one clear blue track of frosty sky. The sun—the very sun of heaven—made new the outline of every street, flashed on windows, gave beauty to spires and domes, revealed dazzling whiteness in untrodden places where the snow still lingered. The air was like a spirit of joyous life, tingling the blood to warmth and with a breath freeing the brain from sluggish vapours. Such days London sees but once in half a dozen winters.

Thyrza felt the influence of the change. She breathed more easily; her body was no longer the weary weight she had failed under. When she rose and saw such marvellous daylight at her window, involuntarily she let her voice run over a few notes. The power of song was still in her; ah, if health and happiness had companioned with her, would she not have sung as few ever did!

But henceforth that was part of the past, part of what she must forget and renounce. When she said to Mrs. Ormonde that she would still try to keep up her singing, there was a thought in her mind worthy of a woman cast in such mould as hers. She had a vision of herself, on some day not far off, sending forth her voice in glorious song, and knowing that among the crowd before her *he* sat and listened. He would know her then. To him her voice would say what no one else understood, and for a moment—she wished it to be for no more than a moment—he would scorn himself for having forgotten her.

It was all gone into the past, buried for ever out of sight. She would no longer even sigh over the memory. If the sky were always as to-day, if there were always sunlight to stand in and the living air to drink, she might find the life before her in truth as little of a burden as it seemed this morning. But the days would again be wrapped in nether fumes, the foul air would stifle her, her blood would go stagnant, her eyes would weep with the desolate rain. Why should Gilbert remain in England? Were there no countries where the sun shone that would give a man and a woman toil whereby to support themselves? Luke Ackroyd had spoken of going to Canada. He said it cost so little to get there, and that life was better than in England. Could not Gilbert take her yonder? But there was his mother, old, weary; no such change was possible for her. And the thought of her reminded Thyrza

of one of the first duties she must take upon herself. It mattered little where she lived—mattered little if the sun-dawn never broke again. Her life was to be in a narrow circle, and to that she would accustom herself.

What of to-morrow? To-day she was full of courage, even of a kind of hope. Never should Gilbert feel that she was not wholly his; never would she wrong his faithfulness by slighting the claims of his love. In her misery she had said that there were things she could not do—could not bear; as if a woman cannot take up any burden that she wills, and carry it faithfully even as far as the gates of death! And this duty before her she would not even think of as a burden. There are some women who never know what love is, who marry a man because they respect and like him, and are good wives their life long. She would be even as one of these. Suppose love to be something she had outgrown; the idleness of girls. Now was the season of her womanhood, and the realities of life left no room for folly.

How long since she had felt so well! She sewed through the morning, and had but little trouble to keep her thoughts always forward-looking. She sang a little to herself, for who but must sing when there is sunlight? She ate when dinner was brought to her. Then she prepared to go out for half an hour.

Clara just then came up.

‘Ah, you are going out! Do come with us into

the park, will you? You haven't to go anywhere. My husband has taken a half-holiday on purpose to skate. Reckless man! He says you don't get skating weather like this every day. Can you skate?'

Thyrza shook her head, smiling.

'No more can I. Harold wants to teach me, but it seems absurd to bruise oneself all over, and make oneself ridiculous too, to learn an amusement you can't practise once in five years. But do come with us. It really is nice to watch them skating.'

'Yes, I will come, gladly,' Thyrza said.

The three went forth. Harold swung his skates about and manifested extraordinary spirits. He talked with his wonted eloquence of the delights of speeding over the ice. It was one of England's misfortunes, he said, that noble bodily exercise was restricted almost entirely to the wealthy classes. The social effect would be immediate and surprising if working people had opportunities for games and sports of the higher kind.

And so they came to the ice in Regent's Park, and Harold put on his skates, and was speedily exhibiting his skill amid the gliding crowd. Clara and her companion walked along the edge. Thyrza, regarding this assembly of people who had come forth to enjoy themselves, marvelled inwardly. It was so hard to understand how anyone could enter with such seriousness into mere amusement. How many happy people the world contained! Of all this black-coated swarm, not one with a trouble that could not be flung away at the



summons of a hard frost! They sped about as if on wings, they shouted to friends, they had catastrophes and laughed aloud over them. And, as she looked on, the scene grew so unreal that it frightened her. These did not seem to be human beings. How came it that they were exempt from the sorrow that goes about the world, blighting lives and breaking hearts? Or was it she that lived in a dream, while these were really awake? She was not sorrowful now, but light-hearted pastime such as this was unintelligible to her.

Clara chattered and ran, and thoroughly enjoyed herself. At one spot she came at length to a pause, having lost sight of her husband, fretting that she could not find him. Her eye discovered him at length, however, and just as she spoke her satisfaction, she was surprised by a laugh from Thyrza—a real laugh, sweet and clear as it used to be.

‘What is it?’ she asked in wonder.

‘Oh, look! Do look!’

Just before them, on the ice, a little troop of ducks was going by, fowl dispossessed of their wonted swimming-ground by the all-hardening frost. Of every two steps the waddlers took, one was a hopeless slip, and the spectacle presented by the unhappy birds in their effort to get along at a good round pace was ludicrous beyond resistance. They sprawled and fell, they staggered up again with indignant wagging of head and tail, they rushed forward only to slip more desperately; now one leg failed them, now the other, now

both at once. And all the time they kept up a cackle of annoyance; they looked about them with foolish eyes of amazement and indignation; they wondered, doubtless, what the world was coming to, when an honest duck's piece of water was suddenly stolen from him, and he was subjected to insult on the top of injury.

Thyrza gazed at them, and the longer she gazed the more merrily she laughed.

‘Poor ducks! I never saw anything so ridiculous. There, look! The one with the neck all bright colours! He’ll be down again; there, I said he would! Why *will* they try to go so quickly? They wouldn’t stumble half so much if they walked gently.’

Clara joined in her laughter, forgetting all about Harold for a few minutes. But when she remembered him he was at a great distance, and they had to walk on.

Thyrza had thought that nothing in the world could move her to unfeigned laughter. Yet as often as she thought of the ducks it was with revival of mirth. She laughed at them long after, alone in her room.

It was as bright a day on the morrow, and still she knew that lightness of heart, that freedom of the breath which is physical happiness. Had she by the mere act of redeeming her faith to Gilbert brought upon herself this reward? It was so strangely easy to keep dark thoughts at a distance. She had not lain awake in the night, for her a wonderful experience. Could it last?

There was a letter this morning from Gilbert. She did not open it at once, for she knew that there would be more pain than content in reading it. Yet, when she had read it, she found that it was not out of harmony with her mood. He wrote because he could say things in this silent way which would not come to his lips so well. The gratitude he expressed—simply, powerfully—moved Thyrza; not as the words of one she loved would have moved her, but to a feeling of calm thankfulness that she had it in her power to give so much joy. And perhaps some day she could give him affection. She had, in her belief, spoken truly when she said that he was above her. He was no ignorant man, without a thought save of his day's earnings. She could respect his mind, as she had always done, and his character she could reverence. It was well.

She told Mrs. Emerson that she was going to see her sister again, and that probably she would not return till Sunday night.

On setting forth, she had a letter to post. It was to Mrs. Ormonde. Purposely she had delayed writing this till Saturday afternoon; she wished to show that there had been a couple of days for thought since the step was taken, and that she could speak with calm consciousness of what she had done. The posting of this letter was like saying a last good-bye.

Lydia was again waiting just at the door, and again they reached the room without having been observed.

‘I shall go down at once,’ Thyrza said. ‘Gilbert expects me. I am going to speak to Mrs. Grail.’

Lydia was pleased to see that the pale face had not that terrible look to-night. To-night there were smiles for her, and many affectionate words. During Thyrza’s absence of half an hour, she sat puzzling over the mystery, as she had puzzled since Thursday night. Would all indeed be well? It was so sudden, so unthought of, so hard to believe. For Lydia had by degrees come to think of her sister as raised quite above this humble station. Though she could not reconcile herself to it, though she would above all things have chosen that Thyrza should still marry Gilbert, yet there was a contradictory sort of pride in knowing that her sister was a lady. Lyddy, we are aware, was little given to logical processes of thought; her feelings often got her into troublesome perplexities.

Thyrza came up again. Mrs. Grail had received her with tears and silence at first, but soon with something of the gratitude which Gilbert felt.

‘I told them I was going to stay till to-morrow. I shall have tea with them then. You’ll spare me for an hour, Lyddy?’

There was no talk between them as yet on the main subject of their thoughts. Something that was said caused Lydia to go to her cupboard and bring forth an object which Thyrza at once recognised. It was Mr. Boddy’s violin.

‘I shall always keep it,’ she said. ‘I have had

offers to buy it, but I shall have to be badly in want before it goes.'

She had redeemed it from the pawnbroker's, and no one had opposed her claim to possess it. The expenses of the old man's burial had been defrayed by a subscription Ackroyd got up among those who remembered Mr. Boddy with kindness.

Thyrza touched the strings, and shrank back frightened at the sound. The ghost of dead music, it evoked the ghost of her 'dead self.

They fell into solemn talk. Thyrza had resolved that she would not tell her sister the truth of everything for a long time; some day she would do so, when the new life had become old habit. But, as they sat by the fire and spoke in low voices, she was impelled to make all known. Why should there any longer be a secret between Lyddy and herself? It would be yet another help to her if she told Lyddy; she felt at length that she must.

So the story was whispered. Lydia could only hold her sister in her arms, and shed tears of love and pity.

'We will never speak of it again, dearest,' Thyrza said; 'never, as long as we live!'

'No, never as long as we live!'

'It's all very long ago, already,' Thyrza added. 'I don't suffer now, dear one. I have borne so much, that I think I can't feel pain any more. With you, here in our home, I am happy, and wherever I am, I don't think I shall ever be *unhappy*. I have written to

Mrs. Ormonde, and she will let him know. He will think I came back because I had long forgotten him, and was sorry that I ever left Gilbert. You see, that's what I wish him to believe. Now there'll be nothing to prevent him from marrying who he likes. No one can say that he has done harm which can never be undone, can they? I shall rest now, and life will seem easy. So little will be asked of me; I shall do my best so willingly.'

The time for sleep drew on. Lydia had been silent; now she took Thyrza's hand and said:

'Dear, do you say a prayer at night?'

Thyrza averted her eyes.

'No, Lyddy. I have never thought of it.'

'We never used to, but since then—you know I've altered in those things. I always say a prayer now, and I always pray for you, Thyrza. Will you say it with me to-night. You know "Our Father"?''

'I will say it with you, dear sister. Whatever you do is good.'

So Lyddy had joy again in her pure heart, hearing the words, which had come to be her solace, on the lips of her dear one restored to her.

In the morning Thyrza said:

'I have a fancy, Lyddy. I want you to do my hair for me again.'

'Like you wear it now?'

'No, I mean in the old way. Will it make me



look a child again? Never mind, that is what I should like. I'll have it so when I go downstairs to tea.'

And whilst Lydia was busy with the golden tresses, Thyrza laughed suddenly. She had only just thought again of the ducks in the park. She told all about them, and they laughed together.

'I wonder whether Mrs. Jarmey knows I'm here,' Thyrza said. 'You think not? Won't someone be coming to see you? Won't Mary?'

'Yes. She always calls for me to go to chapel. Would you rather not see her?'

'Not to-day, Lyddy. Not till I'm in my own home.'

'But I may tell her you're here? I'll go down in time to meet her, and I won't go to chapel this morning. No, I'll stay with you this morning, dear.'

So it was arranged. And they cooked their dinner as they used to; only Thyrza declared that Lydia had been extravagant in providing.

'I see how you indulge yourself, now that I'm away! Oh yes, of course you pretend it's only for me.'

How could she be so merry? Lydia thought. But this smile was not always on her face.

The day passed very quickly. Lydia said she would go out whilst Thyrza was with the Grails; she had promised to see someone. Thyrza did not ask who it was.

When she came upstairs again the other had not yet returned. She was yet a quarter of an hour away. Then she appeared with signs of haste.



‘I was afraid you’d be here alone,’ she said.

‘But have you had tea, Lyddy?’

‘Yes.’

This ‘yes’ was said rather mysteriously. And Lydia’s subsequent behaviour was also mysterious. She took her hat off and stood with it in her hand, as if not knowing where to put it. Then she sat down, forgetting that she still wore her jacket. Reminded of this, she stood about the room, undecidedly.

‘What are you thinking of, Lyddy?’

‘Nothing.’

She sat down at last, but had so singular a countenance that Thyrza was obliged to remark on it.

‘What have you been doing? Never mind, if you’d rather not tell me.’

Two or three minutes passed before Lydia could make up her mind to tell. She began by saying:

‘You know when I went down to see Mary this morning?’

‘Yes.’

‘She said she’d seen—that she’d seen Mrs. Poole, and that I was to be sure to go round to Mrs. Poole’s some time in the afternoon, as she wanted to see me, particular.’

‘Yes. And that’s where you went?’

Lydia seemed to have no more to say. Thyrza looked at her searchingly.

‘Well, Lyddy, there’s nothing in that. What else? I know there’s something else.’

‘Yes, there is. I went to the house, and, when I knocked at the door, Mr. Ackroyd opened it.’

Thyrza had begun to tremble. Her eyes watched her sister’s face eagerly; she read something in the heightened colour it showed.

‘And then, Lyddy? And then?’

‘He asked me to come into the sitting-room. And then he—he said he wanted me to marry him, Thyrza.’

‘Lyddy! It is true? At last?’

Thyrza could scarcely contain herself for joy. She had longed for this. No happiness of her own would have been in truth complete until there came like happiness to her sister. She knew how long, how patiently, with what self-sacrifice, Lydia had been faithful to this her first love. Again and again the love had seemed for ever hopeless; yet Lydia gave no sign of sorrow. The sisters were unlike each other in this. Lydia’s nature, fortunately for herself, was not passionate; but its tenderness none knew as Thyrza did, its tenderness and its steadfast faith.

‘Thyrza, anyone would think you are more glad of it than I am.’

‘There are no words to tell my gladness, dearest! Good Lyddy! At last, at last!’

Her face changed from moment to moment; it was now flushed, now again pale. Once or twice she put her hand against her side.

‘How excitable you always were, little one!’ Lydia

said. 'Come and sit quietly. It's bad luck when anyone makes so much of a thing.'

Thyrza grew calmer. Her face showed that she was suppressing pain. In a few minutes she said :

'I'll just lie down, Lyddy. I shall be better directly. Don't trouble, it's nothing. Come and sit by me. How glad I am! Look pleased, just to please me, will you?'

Both were quiet. Thyrza said it had only been a feeling of faintness; it was gone now.

The fire was getting low. Lydia went to stir it. She had done so and was turning to the bed again, when Thyrza half rose, crying in a smothered voice :

'Lyddy! Come!'

Then she fell back. Her sister was bending over her in an instant, was loosening her dress, doing all that may restore one who has fainted. But for Thyrza there was no awaking.

Had she not herself desired it? And what gift more blessed, of all that man may pray for? 'He giveth His beloved sleep.'

She was at rest, the pure, the gentle, at rest in her maidenhood. The joy that had strength to kill her was not of her own; of the two great loves between which her soul was divided, that which was lifelong triumphed in her life's last moment.

She who wept there through the night would have lain dead if that cold face could in exchange have been

touched by the dawn to waking. She felt that her life was desolate; she mourned as for one on whom the extremity of fate has fallen. Mourn she must, in the anguish of her loss; she could not know the cruelty that was in her longing to bring the sleeper back to consciousness. The heart that had ached so wearily would ache no more; for the tired brain there was no more doubt. Had existence been to her but one song of thanksgiving, even then to lie thus had been more desirable. For to sleep is better than to wake, and how should we who live bear the day's burden but for the promise of death.

On Monday at noon there arrived a telegram, addressed to 'Miss Thyrsa Trent.' Gilbert received it from Mrs. Jarmey, and he took it upstairs to Lydia, who opened it. It was from Mrs. Ormonde; she was at the Emersons', and wished to know when Thyrsa would return: she desired to see her.

'Will you write to her, Gilbert?' Lydia asked.

'Wouldn't it be better if I went to see her?'

Yes, that was felt to be better. It was known that Thyrsa had written to Mrs. Ormonde on Saturday, so that nothing needed to be explained; Gilbert had only to bear his simple news.

Arrived at the house, he had to wait. Mrs. Ormonde was gone out for an hour, and neither Harold nor his wife was at home. He sat in the Emersons' parlour, seldom stirring, his eyes unobservant. For Gilbert

Grail there was little left in the world that he cared to look at.

Mrs. Ormonde came in. She regarded Gilbert with uncertainty, having been told that someone waited for her, but nothing more. Gilbert rose and made himself known to her. Then, marking his expression, she was fearful.

‘You have come from Miss Trent—from Thyrza?’ she said, giving him her hand.

‘She could not come herself, Mrs. Ormonde.’

‘Thyrza is ill?’

He hesitated. His face had told her the truth before he uttered :

‘She is dead!’

It is seldom that we experience a simple emotion. When the words, incredible at first, had established their meaning in her mind, Mrs. Ormonde knew that with her human grief there blended an awe-struck thankfulness. She stood on other ground than Lydia’s, on other than Gilbert’s; her heart had been wrung by the short unaffected letter she had received from Thyrza, and, though she could only acquiesce, the future had looked grey and joyless. To hear it said of Thyrza, ‘She is dead!’ chilled her; the world of her affections was beyond measure poorer by the loss of that sweet and noble being. But could she by a word have reversed the decision of fate, love would not have suffered her to speak it.

They talked together, and at the end she said :

‘If Lydia will let me come and see her, I shall be very grateful. Will you ask her, and send word to me speedily?’

The permission was granted. Mrs. Ormonde went to Walnut Tree Walk that evening, and Gilbert conducted her to the door of the room. The lamp gave its ordinary stinted light. There was nothing unusual in the appearance of the chamber. In the bed one lay asleep.

Mrs. Ormonde took Lydia’s hands and without speaking kissed her. Then Lydia raised the lamp from the table, and held it so that the light fell on her sister’s face. No remnant of pain was there, only calm, unblemished beauty; the lips were as naturally composed as if they might still part to give utterance to song; the brow showed its lines of high imaginative-ness even more clearly than in life. The golden braid rested by her neck as in childhood.

‘Have you any picture of her?’ Mrs. Ormonde asked.

‘No.’

‘Will you let me have one made—drawn from her face now, but looking as she did in life? It shall be done by a good artist; I think it can be done successfully.’

Lydia was in doubt. The thought of introducing a stranger to this room to sit and pore upon the dead face with cold interest was repugnant to her. Yet if Thyrza’s face really could be preserved, to look at her,

for others dear to her to look at, that would be much. She gave her assent.

Mary Bower came frequently ; her silent presence was a help to Lydia through the miseries of the next few days.

One other there was who asked timidly to be allowed to see Thyrza once more—her friend Totty. She sought Mary Bower, and said how much she wished it, though she feared Lydia would not grant her wish. But it was granted readily. Totty had her sad pleasure, and her solemn memory.

Mrs. Ormonde knew that it was better for her not to attend the funeral. On the evening before, she left at the house a small wreath of white flowers. Lydia, Gilbert, Mary Bower, Luke Ackroyd and his sister, these only went to the cemetery. He whose thought at least Thyrza would have wished to follow her to the grave, was too far away to know of her death till later.

The next day, Lydia sat for an hour with Ackroyd. They did not speak much. But before she left him, Lydia looked into his face and said :

‘Do you wish me to believe, Luke, that I shall never see my sister again?’

He bent his face and kept silence.

‘Do you think that I could live if I believed that she was gone for ever? That I should never meet Thyrza after this, never again?’

‘I shall never wish you to think in that way, Lyddy,’ he answered, kindly. ‘I’ve often talked as if



I knew things for certain, when I know nothing. You're better in yourself than I am, and you may feel more of the truth.'

The next morning, Lydia went to her work as usual. Gilbert had already returned to his. The clear winter sunshine was already a thing of the far past; in the streets was the slush of thaw, and darkness fell early from the obscured sky.

## CHAPTER XV.

## THE LIVING.

THIS winter the Newthorpes spent abroad. Mr. Newthorpe was in very doubtful health when he went to Ullswater, just before Egremont's return to England, and by the end of the autumn his condition was such as to cause a renewal of Annabel's former fears. On a quick decision, they departed for Cannes, and remained there till early in the following April.

'There's a sort of absurdity,' Mr. Newthorpe remarked, 'in living when you can think of nothing but how you're to save your life. Better have done with it, I think. It strikes me as an impiety, too, to go playing at hide-and-seek with the gods.'

They came back to Eastbourne, which, on the whole, seemed to suit the invalid during these summer months. He did little now but muse over a few favourite books and listen to his daughter's conversation. Comparatively a young man, his energies were spent, his life was behind him. To Annabel it was infinitely sorrowful to have observed this rapid process of decay. She could not be persuaded that the failure of his powers

was anything more than temporary. But her father lost no opportunity of warning her that she deceived herself. He had his reasons for doing so.

His temper was perfect : his outlook on the world remained that of a genial pessimist, a type of man common enough in our day. He seemed to find a pleasure in urbanely mocking at his own futility.

‘I am the sort of man,’ he once said, ‘of whom Tourguéneff would make an admirable study. There’s tragedy in me, if you have the eyes to see it. I don’t think anyone can help feeling kindly towards me. I don’t think anyone can altogether despise me. Yet my life is a mere inefficacy.’

‘You have had much enjoyment in your life, father,’ Annabel replied, ‘and enjoyment of the purest kind. In our age of the world I think that must be a sufficient content.’

‘Why, there you’ve hit it, Bell. ’Tis the age. There’s somebody else I know who had better take warning by me. But I think he has done.’

They were talking thus as they sat alone in one of the places of shelter on the Parade. Other people had departed on the serious business of dining ; but the evening was beautiful, and these two were tempted to remain and watch the sea.

‘You mean Mr. Egremont,’ Annabel said.

‘Yes. I wonder very much what he will be at my age. He won’t be anything particular, of course.’

‘No, I don’t suppose he will do anything remarkable,’ the girl assented impartially.

‘Yet he might have done,’ recommenced her father, with some annoyance, as if his remark had not elicited the answer he looked for. ‘This mill-work of his I consider mere discipline. I should have thought two years of it enough; three certainly ought to be. A fourth, and he will never do anything else.’

‘What else should he do?’

Mr. Newthorpe laughed a little.

‘There’s only one thing for such a fellow to do nowadays. Let him write something.’

‘Write?’ Annabel mused. ‘Yes, I suppose there is nothing else. Yet he happens to have sufficient means.’

‘Do you mean it for an epigram? Well, it will pass. True, there’s the hardship of his position. There’s nothing for him to do but to write, yet he is handicapped by his money. I should have done something worth the doing, if I had had to write for bread and cheese. Let him show that he has something in him, in spite of the fact that he has never gone without his dinner. Yes, but that would prove him an extraordinary man, and we agree that he is nothing of the kind.’

‘Haven’t you ever felt a sort of uneasy shame when you have heard of another acquaintance taking up the pen?’

‘Of course I have. I’ve felt the same when I’ve heard of someone being born.’

‘Suppose I announced to you that I was writing a novel?’

‘I am a philosopher, Bell.’

‘Precisely. It would be disagreeable to me if I heard that Mr. Egremont was writing a novel. If he published anything very good, it wouldn’t trouble one so much after the event. I don’t see why he should write. I think he’d better continue to give half his day to something practical, and the other half to the pleasures of a man of culture. It will preserve his balance.’

‘Bella mia, you are very disillusioned for a young girl.’

‘I don’t feel that the term is applicable to me. I am disillusioned, my father, because I am getting reasonably old.’

‘You live too much alone.’

‘I prefer it.’

Mr. Newthorpe seemed to be turning over a thought.

‘I suppose,’ he said at length, with a glance at his daughter, ‘that what you have just said explains our friend’s return to his oil-cloth.’

‘Not entirely, I think.’

‘H’m. You sent him about his business, however.’

Annabel looked straight before her at the sea; her lips barely smiled.

‘ You are mistaken. He gave me no right to do so.

‘ Oh ? Then I have been on a wrong tack.’

‘ Shall we walk homewards ?’

Towards the end of August, Mr. and Mrs. Dalmaine were at Eastbourne for a few days. Paula spent one hour with her cousin in private, no more. The two had drifted further apart than ever. But in that one hour Paula had matter enough for talk. There had been a General Election during the summer, and Mr. Dalmaine had victoriously retained his seat for Vauxhall. His wife could speak of nothing else.

‘ What I would have given if you could have seen me canvassing, Bell ! Now I’ve found the one thing that I can do really well. I wish Parliaments were annual !’

‘ My dear Paula, what has made you so misanthropic ?’

‘ I don’t understand. You know I never do understand your clever remarks, Bell ; please speak quite simply, will you ? Oh, but the canvassing ! Of course I didn’t get on with people’s wives as well as with people themselves ; women never do, you know. You should have heard me arguing questions with working men and shopkeepers ! Mr. Dalmaine once told me I’d better keep out of politics, as I only made a bungle of it ; but I’ve learnt a great deal since then. He admits now that I really do understand the main questions. Of course it’s all his teaching. He puts things so

clearly, you know. I suppose there's no one in the House who makes such clear speeches as he does.'

'The result of your work was very satisfactory.'

'Wasn't it! Fifteen hundred majority! Then we drove all about the borough, and I had to bow nicely to people who waved their hats and shouted. It was a new sensation; I think I never enjoyed anything so much in my life. He is enormously popular, my husband. And everybody says he is doing an enormous lot of good. You know, Bell, it was a mere chance that he isn't in the Ministry! His name was mentioned; we know it for a fact. There's no doubt whatever he'll be in next time, if the Liberal Government keeps up. It is so annoying that Parliaments generally last so long! Think what that will be, when he is a Minister! I shouldn't wonder if you come to see me some day in Downing Street, Bell.'

'I should be afraid, Paula.'

'Nonsense! Your husband will bring you. Don't you think Mr. Dalmaine's looking remarkably well? I'm so sorry I haven't got my little boy here for you to see. We've decided that *he's* to be Prime Minister! I hope you read Mr. Dalmaine's speeches, Bell?'

'Frequently.'

'That's good of you! He's thinking of publishing a volume of those that deal with factory legislation. You should have heard what they said about him, at the election time!'

Paula was still charming, but it must be confessed



a trifle vulgarised. Formerly she had not been vulgar at all; at present one discerned unmistakably the influence of her husband, and of the world in which she lived. In person, she showed the matron somewhat prematurely; one saw that in another ten years she would be portly; her round fair face would become too round and too pinky. Mentally, she was at length formed, and to Mr. Dalmaine was due the credit of having formed her.

This gentleman did his kinsfolk the honour of calling upon them. He had grown a little stouter; he bore himself with conscious dignity; you saw that he had not much time, nor much attention, to bestow upon unpolitical people. He was suave and abrupt by turns; he used his hands freely in conversing. Mr. Newthorpe smiled much during the interview with him, and, a few hours later, when alone with Annabel, he suddenly exclaimed:

‘What an ignorant pretentious numskull that fellow is!’

‘Of whom do you speak?’

‘Why, of Dalmaine, of course.’

‘My dear father!—A philanthropist! One of the forces of the time!’

Mr. Newthorpe leaned back and laughed.

‘Perfectly true,’ he said presently. ‘Whence we may arrive at certain conclusions with regard to mankind at large and our time in particular. That poor pretty girl! It’s too bad.’

‘She is happy.’

‘True again. And it would be foolish to wish her miserable. Bell, let us join hands and go to the old ferryman’s boat together.’

‘It would cost me no pang, father. Still we will walk a little longer on the sea-shore.’

And whilst this conversation was going on, Mr. and Mrs. Dalmaine sat after dinner on the balcony of their hotel, talking occasionally. Dalmaine smoked a cigar : his eyes betrayed the pleasures of digestion and thought on high matters of State.

He said all at once :

‘By-the-by, Lady Wigger is at the Queen’s Hotel, I see. You will call to-morrow.’

‘Lady Wigger? But really I don’t think I can, dear,’ Paula replied, timidly.

‘Why not, dear?’

‘Why, you know she was so shockingly rude to me at the Huntleys’ ball. You said it was abominable, yourself.’

‘So it was, but you’d better call.’

‘I’d much rather not.’

Dalmaine looked at her with Olympian surprise.

‘But, my dear,’ he said, with suave firmness, ‘I said that you had better call. The people must not be neglected ; they will be useful. Do you understand me?’

‘Yes, love.’

Paula was quiet for a few moments, then talking as brightly as ever. . . .

One day close upon the end of September Mrs. Ormonde had to pay a visit to the little village of West Dean, which is some four miles distant from Eastbourne, inland and westward. Business of a domestic nature took her thither; she wished to visit a cottage for the purpose of seeing a girl whom she thought of engaging as a servant. The day was very beautiful; she asked the Newthorpes to accompany her on the drive. Mr. Newthorpe preferred to remain at home; Annabel accepted the invitation.

The road was uphill, until the level of the Downs was reached; then it went winding along, with fair stretches of scenery on either hand, between fields fragrant of Autumn, overhead the broad soft purple sky. First East Dean was passed, a few rustic houses nestling, as the name implies, in its gentle hollow. After that, another gradual ascent, and presently the carriage paused at a point of the road immediately above the village to which they were going.

The desire to stop was simultaneous in Mrs. Ormonde and her companion; their eyes rested on as sweet a bit of landscape as can be found in England, one of those scenes which are typical of the Southern counties. It was a broad valley, at the lowest point of which lay West Dean. The hamlet consists of very few houses, all so compactly grouped about the old church that from this distance it seemed as if the hand could cover them. The roofs were overgrown with lichen, yellow on slate, red on tiles. In the farmyards

were haystacks with yellow conical coverings of thatch. And around all closed dense masses of chestnut foliage, the green just touched with gold. The little group of houses had mellowed with age; their guarded peacefulness was soothing to the eye and the spirit. Along the stretch of the hollow the land was parcelled into meadows and tilth of varied hue. Here was a great patch of warm grey soil, where horses were drawing the harrow; yonder the same work was being done by sleek black oxen. Where there was pasture, its chalky-brown colour told of the nature of the earth which produced it. A vast oblong running right athwart the far side of the valley had just been strewn with loam; it was the darkest purple. The bright yellow of the 'kelk' spread in several directions; and here and there rose thin wreaths of white smoke, where a pile of uprooted couch-grass was burning; the scent was borne hither by a breeze that could be scarcely felt.

The clock of the old church struck four.

'A kindness, Mrs. Ormonde!' said Annabel. 'Let me stay here whilst you drive down into the village. I don't wish to see the people there just now. To sit here and look down on that picture will do me good.'

'By all means. But I dare say I shall be half an hour. It will take ten minutes to drive down.'

'Never mind. I shall sit here on the bank, and enjoy myself.'

Now it happened that on this same September day, a young man left Brighton and started to walk eastward along the coast. He had come into Brighton from London the evening before, having to pay a visit to the family of an acquaintance of his who had recently died in Pennsylvania, and who, when dying, had asked him to perform this office on his return to England. He was no stranger to Brighton; he knew that, if one is obliged to visit the place, it is well to be there under cover of the night and to depart as speedily as possible from amid its vulgar hideousness. So, not later than eight on the following morning, he had left the abomination behind him, and was approaching Rottingdean.

His destination was Eastbourne; the thought of going thither on foot came to him as he glanced at a map of the coast whilst at breakfast. The weather was perfect, and the walk would be full of interest.

One would have said that he had a mind very free from care. For the most part he stepped on at a good round pace, observing well; sometimes he paused, as if merely to enjoy the air. He was in excellent health; he smiled readily.

At Rottingdean he lingered for a while. A soft mist hung all around; sky and sea were of a delicate blurred blue-grey, the former mottled in places. The sun was not visible, but its light lay in one long gleaming line out on the level water; beyond, all was vapour-veiled. There were no breakers; now and then a larger ripple

than usual splashed on the beach, and that was the only sound the sea gave. It was full tide ; the water at the foot of the cliffs was of a wonderful green, pellucid, delicate, through which the chalk was visible, with dark masses of weed here and there. Swallows in great numbers flew about the edge, and thistle-down floated everywhere. From the fields came a tinkle of sheep-bells.

The pedestrian sighed when he rose to continue his progress. It was noticeable that, as he went on, he lost something of his cheerfulness of manner ; probably the early rising and the first taste of exercise had had their effect upon him, and now he was returning to his more wonted self. The Autumn air, the sun-stained mist, the silent sea, would naturally incline to pensiveness one who knew that mood.

The air was unimaginably calm ; the thistle-down gave proof that only the faintest breath was stirring. On the Downs beyond Rottingdean lay two or three bird-catchers, prone as they watched the semicircle of call-birds in cages, and held their hand on the string which closed the nets. The young man spoke a few words with one of these, curious about his craft.

He came down upon Newhaven, and halted in the town for refreshment ; then, having loitered a little to look at the shipping, he climbed the opposite side of the valley, and made his way as far as Seaford. Thence another climb, and a bend inland, for the next indenta-



tion of the coast was Cuckmere Haven, and the water could only be crossed at some distance from the sea. The country through which the Cuckmere flowed had a melancholy picturesqueness. It was a great reach of level meadows, very marshy, with red-brown rushes growing in every ditch, and low trees in places, their trunks wrapped in bright yellow lichen ; nor only their trunks, but the very smallest of their twigs was so clad. All over the flats were cows pasturing, black cows, contrasting with flocks of white sheep which were gathered together, bleating. The coarse grass was sun-scorched ; the slope of the Downs on either side showed the customary chalky green. The mist had now all but dispersed, yet there was still only blurred sunshine. Very lonely, yet homely, was the scene. Rooks hovered beneath the sky, heavily, lazily, and uttered their long caws.

The Cuckmere was crossed, and another ascent began. The sea was now hidden ; the road would run inland, cutting off the great angle made by Beachy Head. The pedestrian had made notes of his track ; he knew that he was now approaching a village called West Dean. He had lingered by the Cuckmere ; now he braced himself. And he came in sight of West Dean as the church clock struck four.

He wished now to make speed to Eastbourne, but the loveliness of the hollow above which the road ran perforce checked him ; he paced forward very slowly, his eyes bent upon the hamlet. Something moved,



near to him. He looked round. A lady was standing in the road, and, of all strange things, a lady of whom at that moment he was thinking.

‘By what inconceivable chance does this happen, Miss Newthorpe?’ he said, taking her offered hand.

‘Surely the question would come with even more force from me,’ Annabel made answer. ‘You might have presumed me to be in England, Mr. Egremont; I, on the other hand, certainly imagined that you were beyond the Atlantic.’

‘I have been in England a day or two.’

‘But here? Looking down upon West Dean?’

‘I have walked from Brighton—one of the most delightful walks I ever took.’

‘A long one, surely. I am waiting for Mrs. Ormonde. She is with the carriage, below. I chose to wait here, to feast my eyes.’

Both turned again to the picture. The two did not sort ill together. Annabel was very womanly, of fair, thoughtful countenance, and she stood with no less grace, though maturer, than by the ripples of Ullswater four years ago. She had the visage of a woman whose intellect is highly trained, a face sensitive to every note of the soul’s music, yet impressed with the sober consciousness which comes of self-study and experience. A woman, one would have said, who could act as nobly as she could speak, yet who would prefer both to live and to express herself in a minor key. And Egremont was not unlike her in some essential

points. The turn for irony was more pronounced on his features, yet he had the eyes of an idealist. He, too, would choose restraint in preference to outbreak of emotion: he too could be forcible if occasion of sufficient pressure lay upon him. And the probability remained, that both one and the other would choose a path of life where there was small risk of their stronger faculties being demanded.

They talked of the landscape, of that exclusively, until Mrs. Ormonde's carriage was seen reascending the hill. Then they became silent, and stood so as their common friend drew near. Her astonishment was not slight, but she gave it only momentary expression, then passed on to general talk.

'I always regard you as reasonably emancipated, Annabel,' she said, 'but none the less I felt a certain surprise in noticing you intimately conversing with a chance wayfarer. Mr. Egremont, be good enough to seat yourself opposite to us.'

They drove back to Eastbourne. All conversed on the way with as much ease as if they had this afternoon set forth in company from The Chestnuts.

'This is what, at school, we used to call a "lift,"' said Egremont.

'A welcome one, too, I should think,' Mrs. Ormonde replied. 'But you always calculated distances by "walks," I remember, when others measure by the carriage or the railway. Annabel, you too are an excellent walker; you have often brought me to ex-

tremities in the lakes, though I wouldn't confess it. And pray, Mr. Egremont, for whom was your visit intended? Shall I put you down at Mr. Newthorpe's door, or had you my humble house in view?'

'It is natural to me to count upon The Chestnuts as a place of rest, at all events,' Walter replied. 'I should not have ventured to disturb Mr. Newthorpe this evening.'

'We will wait at the door, Mrs. Ormonde,' put in Annabel. 'Father will come out as he always does.'

Accordingly the carriage was stopped at the Newthorpes' house, and, as Annabel had predicted, her father sauntered forth.

'Ah, how do you do, Egremont?' he said, after a scarcely appreciable hesitation, giving his hand with perfect self-possession. 'Turned up on the road, have you?'

The ladies laughed. Annabel left the carriage, and the other two drove on to The Chestnuts.

Egremont dined and spent the evening with Mrs. Ormonde. Their conversation was long and intimate, yet it was some time before reference was made to the subject both had most distinctly in mind.

'I went to see Grail as soon as I got to London,' Egremont said at length.

'I am glad of that. But how did you know where to find him?'

'They gave me his address at the old house. He seems comfortably lodged with his friend Ackroyd. Mrs.

Ackroyd opened the door to me ; of course I didn't know her, and she wouldn't know me ; Grail told me who it was afterwards. I could recall no likeness to her sister.'

'There is very little. The poor girl is in calm water at last, I hope. She was to have been married on Midsummer Day, and, the night before, Mrs. Grail died ; so they put it off. And what of Mr. Grail ?'

'He behaved admirably to me ; he did not let me feel for a moment that I excited any trouble in his memory.'

'But does his life seem bitter to him—his employment, I mean ?'

'I can't think he finds it so. He spoke very frankly, and assured me that he has all the leisure time he cared to use. He says he is not so eager after knowledge as formerly ; it is enough for him to read the books he likes. I went with the intention of asking him to let me be of some use, if I could. But it was a delicate matter, in any case, and I found that he understood me without plain speech ; he conveyed his answer distinctly enough. No, I sincerely think that he has reached that point of resignation at which a man dreads to be disturbed. He spoke with emotion of Mrs. Ackroyd ; she is invaluable to him, I saw.'

'She is a true-hearted woman.'

Egremont let a minute pass, then said :

'You will show me the portrait ?'

'Certainly. It hangs in my bedroom ; I will fetch it.'

She went and returned quickly, carrying a red crayon drawing framed in plain oak. In the corner was a well-known signature, that of one of the few living artists to whom one would appeal with confidence for the execution of a task such as this, a man whom success has not vulgarised, and who is still of opinion that the true artist will oftener find his inspiration in a London garret than amid the banality of the plutocrat's drawing-room. The work was of course masterly in execution; it was no less admirable as a portrait. In those few lines of chalk, Thyrza lived. He had divined the secret of the girl's soul, that gift of passionate imagination which in her early years sunk her in hour-long reverie, and later burned her life away. The mood embodied was one so characteristic of Thyrza that one marvelled at the insight which had evoked it from a dead face; she was not happy, she was not downcast; her eyes *saw* something, something which stirred her being, something for which she yearned, passionately, yet with knowledge that it was for ever forbidden to her. A face of infinite pathos, which drew tears to the eyes, yet was unutterably sweet to gaze upon.

Holding the picture, Egremont turned to his companion, and said in a subdued voice :

‘This was Thyrza?’

‘Her very self.’

‘He knew her story?’

‘The bare facts, of course without names, without

details. He would take nothing for the original drawing—Lydia has it—and nothing for this copy which he made me. He said I had done him a great kindness.’

‘Oh, if one could be a man like that!’

The words answered to his thoughts, yet implied something more than their plain meaning. They uttered more than one regret, more than one aspiration.

‘Let me take it, Walter.’

‘One moment!—This was Thyrza?’

‘Let me take it.’

‘Tell me—has Miss Newthorpe seen it?’

‘Yes.’

Mrs. Ormonde bore the picture away. In a few minutes Egremont took his leave, and went to the hotel to which he had sent his travelling-bag from Brighton. It was long before he slept. He was thinking of a night a little more than a year ago, when he had walked by the shore and held debate with himself. . . .

On the following evening, shortly before sunset, Annabel and he walked on the short dry grass of the Down that rises to Beachy Head. There had been another day of supreme tranquillity, of blurred sunshine, of soothing autumnal warmth. And this was the crowning hour. The mist had drifted from the land and the sea; as the two continued their ascent, the view became lovelier. They regarded it, but spoke of other things.

‘I have no wish to go back to America,’ Egremont was saying, ‘but, if I do, I shall very likely settle there for good. I don’t think I am ideally adapted

to a pursuit of that kind, but habit makes it quite tolerable.'

'What should you do if you remained in England?' Annabel asked, her voice implying no more than friendly interest.

'I might say that I don't know, but it wouldn't be true. I know well enough I should live the life of a student, and of a man who looks on contemporary things with an artistic interest, though he lacks the artistic power to use his observations. In time I should marry. I should have pleasure in my house, should make it as beautiful as might be, should gather a very few friends about me. I should not become morbid; the danger of that is over. Every opportunity I saw of helping those less fortunate than myself I should gladly seize; it is not impossible that I might seek opportunities, that I might found some institution—of quite commonplace aims, be assured. For instance, I should like to see other Homes like Mrs. Ormonde's; many women could conduct them, if the means were supplied. And so on.'

'Yes, that is all very reasonable. It lies with yourself to decide whether you might not have a breezier existence in America.'

'True. But not with myself to decide whether I remain here or go back again. I ask you to help me in determining that.'

Annabel stood as one who reflects gravely yet collectedly. Egremont fixed his eyes upon her, until she looked at him; then his gaze questioned silently.



‘Let us understand each other,’ said Annabel. ‘Do you say this because of anything that has been in the past?’

‘Not *because* of it; in continuance of it.’

‘Yet we are both very different from what we were when that happened.’

‘Both, I think. I do not speak now as I did then, yet the wish I have is far more real.’

They were more than half-way up the ascent; it was after sunset, and the mood of the season was changing.

The plain of Pevensey lay like a vision of fairyland, the colouring indescribably delicate, unreal; bands of dark green alternated with the palest and most translucent emeralds. The long stretch of the coast was a faint outline, yet so clear that every tongue of sand, every smallest headland was distinguishable. The sky that rested on the eastern semicircle of horizon was rather neutral tint than blue, and in it hung long clouds of the colour of faded daffodils. A glance overhead gave the reason of this wondrous effect of light; there, and away to the west, brooded a vast black storm-cloud, ragged at the edge, yet seeming motionless; the western sea was very night, its gloom intensified by one slip of silver shimmer, wherein a sail was revealed. The hillside immediately in front of those who stood here was so deeply shadowed that its contrast threw the vision of unearthly light into distance immeasurable. A wind was rising, but, though its low whistling sound was very

audible, it seemed to be in the upper air ; here scarcely a breath was felt.

Annabel said :

‘ Have you seen Thyrza’s portrait ? ’

‘ Yes.’

She raised her eyes ; they were sad, compassionate, yet smiled.

‘ She could not have lived. But you are conscious now of what that face means ? ’

‘ I know nothing of her history from the day when I last saw her, except the mere outward circumstances.’

‘ Nor do I. But I saw her once, here, and I have seen her portrait. The crisis of your life was there. There was your one great opportunity, and you let it pass. She could not have lived ; but that is no matter. You were tried, Mr. Egremont, and found wanting.’

‘ Her love for me did not continue. It was already too late at the end of those two years.’

‘ Was it ? ’

‘ What secret knowledge have you ? ’

‘ None whatever, as you mean it. But it was not too late.’

They were silent. And as they stood thus the sky was again transformed. A steady, yet soft wind from the north-west was propelling the great black cloud seaward, over to France ; it moved in a solid mass, its ragged edges little by little broken off, its bulk detached from the night which lay behind it. And, in

the sky which it disclosed rose as it were a pale dawn, the restored twilight. There amid glimmered the pole-star.

Eastward on the coast, at the far end of Pevensey Bay, the lights of Hastings began to twinkle; out at sea was visible a single gleam, appearing and disappearing, the lightship on the Sovereign Shoals.

Annabel continued speaking :

‘We have both missed something, something that will never again be offered us. When you asked me to be your wife, four years ago at Ullswater, I did not love you. I admired you; I liked you; it would have been very possible to me to marry you. But I had my ideal of love, and I hoped to give my husband something more than I felt for you at that time. A year after, I loved you. I suffered when you were suffering. I was envious of the love you gave to another woman, and I said to myself that the moment I hoped for had come only in vain. Since then I have changed more than I changed in those twelve months. I am not in love with you now; I can talk of these things without a flutter of the pulse. Is it not true?’

She held her hand to him, baring the wrist. Egremont retained the hand in both his own.

‘I can tell you, you see,’ she went on, ‘what I know to be the truth, that you missed the great opportunity of your life when you abandoned Thyrza. Her love would have made of you what mine never could, even though she herself had been taken from you very

soon. I can tell you the mere truth, you see. Dare you still ask for me ?'

'I don't ask, Annabel. I have your hand and I keep it.'

'You may. I don't think I should ever give it to any other man.'

The night was thickening about them.

'Shall we go up to the Head ?' Egremont asked.

'No higher.'

She said it with a significant look, and he understood her.

THE END.

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